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DOMINICAN
MONASTIC SEARCH



Volume 11

Fall/Winter 1992



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DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH

Volume 11

Fall/Winter 1992

DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH is published by the Conference of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers of the United States of America. The Conference is an organization of independent monasteries whose purpose is to foster the monastic contemplative life of the nuns in the spirit of Saint Dominic.

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DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH is a spiritual and theological review written by the nuns. Its purpose is to foster the Dominican monastic contemplative life by the sharing of insights gained from study and prayer. It is published once a year as a service to the nuns. It is also available to the wider Dominican Family and others upon request. A donation of \$8.00 to aid in the cost of printing would be appreciated, when possible.

Contributions to this review should be researched and prepared with concern for literary and intellectual quality. Manuscripts submitted should be clearly typed, single spaced, on one side of the paper only. The deadline for manuscripts is September 1st of each year. Minor editing will be done at the discretion of the editors. If major changes are desired, these will be effected in dialogue with the authors. The editors, in consultation with the Conference Council, reserve the right to reject inappropriate manuscripts, though reasons will be given to the author with courtesy and encouragement.

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Conference of Nuns of the Order of Preachers of the United States of America

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FOLLOWING HIS
TEACHING IS A
KIND OF KNOCKING
THAT CALLS OUT TO
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FATHER

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FATHER WHO GIVES THE BREAD OF GRACE
THROUGH THIS DOOR, MY

GENTLE TRUTH.

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

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EDITORIAL

Reclaiming the Dominican Vision for the 21st Century, the theme of the recent General Assembly of the Conference, also provides the theme for the present issue of DMS. In what has become a tradition with DMS, we reprint here the papers delivered by the nuns and friars who were invited to speak at the Assembly. We do so in order to share their thoughts more widely, hoping thereby to enkindle in the reader the same enthusiasm that fired the hearers and sparked such vivid discussions among them.

When the theme of the Assembly was announced last spring, the editorial board invited the sisters in our communities to write for DMS papers on any of the topics to be addressed at the Assembly. A number of sisters responded to the invitation with the fine presentations included here under the heading Dominican Monastic Tradition. They bear witness to how vital the Dominican vision is in our monasteries and how keen our sisters' zeal is for its preservation.

With this issue, we welcome a new editorial board: Sr. Mary Paul (Washington), Coordinator; Sr. Claire (North Guilford); Sr. Mary Thomas (Buffalo); and Sr. Cynthia Mary (Summit), Business Manager. May God prosper and reward their labors on behalf of the whole Conference.

Sr. Mary Martin, O.P.
Summit

ASSEMBLY PRESENTATIONS

T H E D O M I N I C A N V I S I O N

ROOTS OF OUR MONASTIC LIFE ... INTEGRATION OF ITS ELEMENTS

Sister Mary Magdalen (Newark)

I begin with an introductory note in regard to the theme of our Assembly: "Reclaiming the Dominican Vision for the Twenty-first Century." Those who chose the theme will agree with all of us who lecture that what we are engaged in is not reclaiming the Dominican Vision as of something we have lost, but in the sense of *claiming again*, more deeply and more awarely, what we already have and see; and doing this in the context of our sense of responsibility to those who will follow us in the 21st century. It is in this sense I will speak of *claiming / reclaiming*.

Since this is the first of our lectures, it seems that before examining Dominican Vision in detail we might profitably spend some minutes reflecting on the notion of vision in general - as it might apply to what we want to do in the course of these days together. Understanding what a vision is, does, and can do, will solidly base our listening and discussing during the next few days. Identifying and expanding the vision we already have will be useful in orientating courses of action we may decide to follow.

Simply from the point of view of ourselves as rational beings, we need vision to reach out to ever greater fulfillment of our possibilities. There is an element of vision in all the worthwhile things we do, both individually and communally. The degree to which we keep it before us can significantly influence the quality of our actions.

A clearer vision of what our life should be will ordinarily mean a keener awareness of what choices we should make, what courses of action we ought to pursue, and how and where we are falling short. Clarity of vision likewise provides an accurate standard when we pause to evaluate our life and activity. On the other hand, lack of vision - in the sense we are speaking about it here - threatens us with missing the mark, with boredom or empty routine. And, unfortunately, because living without an impelling vision is not intrinsically evil we do not always sense the danger of futility lurking in a vision-less life.

All this is approaching our subject from a psychological angle, but not without some application in a group gathered like ours for mutual help in delineating and reclaiming its common vision.

An additional point one could profitably make is the effect of permeating the course of our day with this alertness of vision. Keeping our inner eye bright with vision, the vision of what is really happening when we stand in praise at the Office, when we participate in the Mass or worship the Eucharist in private adoration, when we share with our sisters in the daily exchanges

within community; ... maintaining a contemplative vision of reality as we respond to all the details of regular observance, to the discipline of manual labor or of some work of penance, and when we quietly accept the debility of sickness or aging; ... keeping the eyes of our mind and heart bright with vision in all this, means life! It means living in truth! It means wholeness! It is a primary aspect of integration - that within our own spirit.

Moving beyond the psychological approach or, perhaps better, adding to it to consider ourselves as persons living under grace, persons in whom grace has taken the form of a specific vocation, we note an intrinsic connection between a clear-eyed, supernatural vision of our life and knowing where our life is rooted. This *VISION* and our *ROOTS* both have their ultimate reach into God. As we strain to expand our field of vision to possibilities beyond our own limited light, we are really stretching out to him and searching for his vision for our life. As we question more intently what constitutes the sustaining roots of our life and work, we have not gone far enough if we do not reach him, the ultimate Source of our life, its Key and Meaning - the One who reminds us: "*Without me you can do nothing*," the One without whom it means nothing.

This motif of vision-and-roots appears in God's selection and guidance of his Chosen People in the Old Testament. He kept holding up to them his vision for them; he kept reminding them of their roots - their human origins and background - and that their destiny was rooted in his Call and their response to his word. Through all the vicissitudes of their history they were involved in something so much greater than themselves: his vision and choice of mission for them - tied to his covenant with them and his plan of salvation for all people. There is a message here for us: Our call to the Order of Preachers gives us, too, a well-defined role in God's vision of salvation. As one of the Oakland Chapter documents puts it in a powerful line: We have "a vocation for all of humanity." (1)

The theme of this Assembly is summoning us to take time out to look attentively at our roots as nuns of the Order of Preachers, to claim anew the vision which is our heritage, and to strengthen one another in safeguarding that vision for the nuns of tomorrow.

* * * *

As we turn our attention more directly to the *Dominican Vision*, the first thing I might say is that the Dominican Vision is not something we originate. We have been plunged into the midst of it!

And there is one Dominican Vision - from the very beginning - down through many centuries, places, cultures, and persons. It was that vision which inspired and guided Dominic and the beginnings of the Order, and which for nearly eight centuries has perdured through all the hazards of being grasped more or less clearly by each succeeding generation. We can summarize it by saying that God predestined the members of this Order to be persons whose lives would be spent in cherishing his word, in penetrating and being

nourished by it; persons whose energies would be devoted to the service of that word being given to others.

We, the nuns of the Order, may rightly claim and rejoice in what it offers us of holiness and apostolic fruitfulness. Moreover, we have been assured that our role in the Order plays the "highest part" and is "of the greatest importance" in the attainment of the Order's purpose, because our contemplation and our life inasmuch as they are truly and properly Dominican are *by their very nature* ordered to the apostolate which the Dominican family exercises as a whole. (2)

Here is a second aspect of integration for us: the integration of our personal life into the ideals and life and activity of the whole Dominican Family. It has multiple repercussions: on our personal growth in holiness, on the authenticity of Dominican Life in our monasteries, and - very importantly - on the vitality of the Order of Preachers as a whole.

This consciousness of a radical link with and support of the other members of the Order is a facet of our vocation planted by God deep in the spirit of the individual nuns who comprise our communities. One who fails to advert to the fact of her insertion in the broader vision and purpose of the Order can be holy and fervent and fruitful in her pursuit of monastic contemplative life. But her life will lack something of what God intended for her when he called her to be a *Dominican* nun. That "something" is the energizing consciousness of involvement in a unique apostolic mission in the Church, and of an exhilarating fellowship with other women and men in carrying it out.

Women seeking the enclosed contemplative life today will be attracted when they see in us such an awareness of our identity and of our involvement in something great.

To understand *who we are* is critical
for carrying us into the 21st century.

Tracing its historical roots: ... This distinctive identity of ours comes into existence when our holy Father Dominic gathers women converts to the Catholic faith in the monastery of Blessed Mary of Prouille, and bonds them to himself and his earliest companions by associating their life of prayer and penance with his "holy preaching". We contemplate this beginning of our identity with reverence as something sacred transpiring: the insertion of delicate roots in the solid soil of an initial grace which conceals in its lowliness the dynamism of centuries of growth to come.

I would like to linger for a few moments on the picture of these first women whom the Lord was inviting to be "free for God alone" while supporting by their prayer and penance the work in which Saint Dominic was engaged. ... There can be little doubt that their zeal for their way of life was constantly nourished by an awareness of their role in regard to the preaching of Dominic and his companions. With but slight exceptions, we know nothing more

than the names of these eldest sisters of ours, but their lives furnish us a paradigm and a hope. ... A paradigm: Like us they were simply 'who they were', but before God they were women whom he had foreknown, predestined, and called to be part of a work so much more vast than they themselves could possibly have envisioned. -- And that is why they furnish us a hope: that we, like them, can transcend the insignificance of 'who we are of ourselves' and be catalysts to the fulfillment of the Order's mission in our own time.

From these first sisters of ours to the present there is the impressive stretch of nearly eight hundred years in which tens of thousands of women faithfully lived the ideals of the Order, women in whom its vision was claimed and reclaimed: "Nuns of the Order of Preachers" in whom its tradition was made firm.

In recent decades we have been blessed with a new understanding of who we are. Our new Constitutions place us in the midst of rich opportunities for growth in Dominican monastic contemplative life that were only dreamed of in previous decades. But it was precisely because there were those who dreamed of them that a door was opened for their coming to be.

I am reminded of my visiting one of our monasteries a year or two after our Conference had been formed. A wonderful older nun - her face lit up - expressed with enthusiasm her feelings about the Conference: "It's just what I have dreamed of," she said. "It's *an answer to prayer*." ... Are there things we are hesitant to dream about and pray for - **now** - that might become just as possible and normal a few decades in the future - things that are quite consistent with the Dominican Vision as the 21st century overtakes us?

A few indications of where these might develop can be found in movements in recent years: a new attention to our "oneness in diversity" in the concept of "Dominican Family"; the contribution of Dominican women in this family, and their presence and active participation at recent General Chapters; the exhortation from the recent Chapter in Mexico that the nuns from their contemplative identity be in solidarity with the priorities of the Order. (3) Among ourselves, there is the growing movement of our coming together for mutual support in ways new to our tradition where *autonomy* spelled *isolation*.

I add one other - more interior - movement, viz the deepening of the **quality** of life in our monasteries. It is worth recalling that Master General Martin Gillet in his encyclical letter to the nuns on their [then] new Constitutions, sixty years ago, devotes a full half of the letter to encouraging the development of "The Mystical Life of the Nuns". It took forty years for Father Gillet's seminal and practical suggestions to be spelled out within the Nuns' Constitutions themselves. But when we look back on our tradition we find in our Dominican women saints a pronounced trait of mysticism in the best sense of that word.

As we behold the wealth of opportunities at hand to deepen the quality of life in our monasteries, I dare to include in the legacy we may pass on to our sisters in the twenty-first century our claiming-anew of the mystical element in the life of the nuns. Our faithful response to this aspect of our call is among our best gifts to the Friars and to the whole Order. There is all the more reason for what I am saying, when one sometimes sees others - called like ourselves to canonical contemplative life - losing faith in their own charism and seeking validation for their life in elements foreign to it.

I have digressed a bit, though I hope not without profit. Let us return to looking at the Dominican Vision - as it is concretized twenty-four hours of the day in our Constitutions.

For nearly eight centuries the roots of monastic life have been essential supports of our identity within the Order and in the Church. Our intent to be free for God alone and to blend authentic community with silence and solitude are joined to our contemplative attitude toward work, the solemn celebration of the liturgy, works of penance, and our dedication to the word of God - through study as well as through *lectio divina*.

The lecturers who will follow me will treat directly and extensively with many of these, and some other important elements in our Constitutions. So, for my part, I will consider some aspects that may be touched on only indirectly in later lectures.

The nuns on our new Commission which met in Rome this past Spring reported that they had found among the nuns, internationally, "... a common search for equilibrium in the elements that make up our life -- how to balance or integrate them into the life seen as a whole." (4) In the search for equilibrium and integration, I suggest that we can gather up and harmonize these elements and safeguard their balance by viewing our life under two basic, very familiar, and complementary aspects: being "free for God alone", and living all the gift and demand of community with "one mind and heart". Each of us can test the integration, the wholeness of our own life and that of our community, by asking, "How is community functioning among us? How free for God alone is each member?" -- Being free for God alone in one's personal life enables one to be a good all-around community person. The two factors are not separate in practice. If either in some way becomes a hindrance to the other, something is crying out for discernment!

There are many ways of developing the theme of being free for God alone. -- Our last General Assembly did this thoroughly. It is right that our communities be constantly solicitous for this primary freedom, and attentive to remove obstacles to it in community structures and activities. Ultimately, however, whatever my surroundings I must answer for my own life - deep in my heart - whether I am "free for God alone". Having said this, and because the theme of being free for God alone was so thoroughly developed previously, I would like now to offer some thoughts on its

complementary factor in finding equilibrium and integration in living our Dominican Vision, viz *COMMUNITY*.

The Oakland Chapter document "DE VITA COMMUNI" states firmly: "The call to community living is at the heart of our call to the Dominican Life." (5)

We know how essential was the part that Community played in Saint Dominic's vision of the Order. From its Fundamental Constitution [VI] we learn that the structure of the Order as a religious society arises [not only] from its mission - a group of persons intent on a particular apostolic work - [but also] from fraternal communion. In our own Fundamental Constitution we read that the Nuns of the Order came into being when Dominic gathered a small group of women into a community intent on God in oneness of mind and heart. The regulations that Dominic drew up for both friars and nuns flowed out of their living together in community with a work to be done *together* for the Church. Thus their rule of life was, as it must always continue to be, not a sterile codification of laws but a dynamic expression of their life together in response to God's calling them to a common mission.

We could multiply quotations from the Nuns' Constitutions on communion and community. Besides the texts directly related to them it is significant how often the theme of communion emerges in connection with elements of our life in a way that earlier editions of our Constitutions did not make so explicit.

Thus we read:

... **work** serves the common good by building up charity through cooperation; (#105.II)

... **study** encourages unanimity of mind; (#100.II)

... our **celebration of the sacred liturgy** re-lives the communion of the primitive Church in Jerusalem, drawn together by the teaching of the Apostles and united in daily prayer. (#1.IV)

We are told:

... to **judge our failures in fidelity to the gospel** in terms of injury to the common good; (#71)

... that we should **partake of our bodily food** as a sign of sisterly communion. (#54.I)

In the Order community permeates the practice of the evangelical counsels:

Obedience ... The Dominican Vision finds in obedience a principle of unity. It sees obedience as keeping a community faithful to its spirit and mission, when under the leadership of superiors it works for the broader community - the common good of the Church and the Order. (#17.I; 18.I)

Chastity ... In the Dominican Vision, fidelity to her profession of perfect chastity not only makes the nun share intimately the all-embracing divine friendship but also opens to her the beauty of serene human friendship in the common life of her religious family. (#26.II)

Poverty ... It is our living in community that enables the practice of dedicated poverty. The Dominican Vision sees it as drawing us closer together in mutual trust and dependence on one another for the necessities of life. (#3.I,II; 29.I)

The orientation to communion and community has always been a basic principle in the Order. In the past few decades, however, it has been given increasing attention - urging us to a heightened awareness of how much more community means for a Dominican than living in the same house and following a common schedule.

It is possible that in the past the ideal monastic community was understood to be the one in which there was a canonized rigor about doing everything in common; and there resulted some consequent limited sensitivity to the individual. While the balancing of the rights of the individual with her responsibilities to the community will always be a delicate thing, we can be especially grateful for the guidance our present legislation provides in the effort to achieve this balance.

Authentic Dominican community living reflects and continues that joyous freedom within oneself and the gift of self to others which marked the life and fraternal relationships of Saint Dominic.

It is a healthy and attractive vision of life that we can offer the women of today and tomorrow. All around them in the lay state numerous opportunities are available to them for growing in knowledge and love of the Lord and dedication of themselves to the spread of his kingdom. It is a confirmation of our own valuing of community life to note how often they instinctively reach out to share their life with like-minded persons within the support of a stable community. The many lay communities that have been springing up are a phenomenon that forces us to examine their life against ours, and urges us to reclaim what is best in Dominican Community.

We do have reason to trust that Canonical Religious Life will continue in the Church of the 21st century. Part of the heritage we will safeguard for it is our faith in the perennial value of our Dominican Vision and the witness it gives to God's Kingdom among us.

I add what is probably a very familiar quotation from the Oakland Chapter Document on Common Life. It speaks of the ...

... many positive elements in our [Dominican] communities today which are signs of hope to our world:

- the witness of prayer in a secularized world where many are searching for an experience of God;
- the witness of mutual support and understanding in a world where fragmentation is increasing;
- the witness of exceptional generosity in a world where selfishness is growing;
- the witness of unity and love in a world where division and hate abound;
- the witness to stable commitment in a world of insecurity and uncertainty. (6)

In giving this Dominican witness to the world
authentic community is pivotal.

A Dominican does not respond to the demands of community in the frame of mind that says community life is her "great cross." ... Certainly, community life hones us down to size and elicits every sort of virtue, while revealing us to ourselves with sometimes painful clarity. But this does not constitute its essential value and beauty. Rather, we who live in Dominican community are called to mirror the inner life of the Trinity, and by our living in unity within the limits of our monasteries to transcend those limits and be instruments of God's healing of a fragmented world.

I balance the sharing of my thoughts on the place of community in our Dominican Vision by adding a few words on solitude. In fact, one of the challenges that we as Dominican Nuns must constantly face is the successful integration of community and solitude.

Heading the list of elements in the formation of our novices, our Constitutions ask that they be instructed in "common life united with silence and solitude." (#118.II) In our Dominican Vision of monastic life, solitude is not a value pursued in isolation from or taking priority over community; it **accompanies** community. Our present legislation's provision for a solitude we had not been previously allowed is an aspect of our Dominican respect for each person's individual uniqueness.

The women whom Saint Dominic gathered in our first monasteries at Prouille and Rome were plainly to have a spirit that could expand and be 'at home' in community; but just as surely they were to be free for God, 'at home' alone with him in the solitude of the depths of their spirit, welcoming the monastic summons to fruitful solitude as fundamental to their apostolic mission of contemplative prayer.

If in the past an emphasis was placed on community at the expense of solitude, the Dominican Vision for the 21st century summons us to continue to reclaim personally and as a community the opportunities that solitude - sought with wisdom - affords us for growth in the contemplative spirit, and for best fulfilling our responsibility that God's word may accomplish those things for which it was sent. (LCM 1.II)

* * * *

The Dominican Vision is not vague or utopian. From the beginning it has been clearly delineated and it has solid theological underpinnings. To be guided by it is to breathe the fresh air of truth, and to devote ones energies for a lifetime to formation in truth and to sharing with others the truth one has seen and lived.

The Vision is spelled out in laws -- yes. There is an orderliness about the Dominican Vision that has an enlightened respect for law, but simply as the maidservant of the life for which the law exists. In an age teetering with permissiveness we continue

to reclaim for ourselves and those who will follow us Saint Dominic's attractive characteristic of balancing firmness in holding to the laws that guide our life, with wisdom in their application.

The Dominican Nun is called to be a woman of vision. She is invited to a maturity which takes all the riches our way of life provides and harmonizes them within the wholeness of one who has become "total gift" - to God and for her brothers and sisters.

Faced with the awesomeness of the Vision and the Call, I can only echo Saint Paul's words:

"It is not that I have already taken hold of it or have already attained perfect maturity, but I continue my pursuit in hope that I may possess it ... straining forward to what lies ahead, ... the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:12-14)

To such were the life and energies of Saint Dominic directed.
To such must ours also be drawn.

NOTES

1. General Chapter of Oakland, 1989, Commission IV, Document on the Priorities of the Order I.3.
2. Br. Anicetus Fernandez, O.P., Master General, Letter of Presentation, Book of Constitutions of the Nuns of the Order of Preachers, USA 1987, p.5.
3. General Chapter of Mexico, 1992, Commission Document on the Dominican Family, Exhortation 11.g.
4. Report of the Second Meeting of the Commission of Nuns, Rome, 1992, Part I. Responses of the Monasteries to the Orbe Letter, final paragraph. Eng. trans. p.7.
5. General Chapter of Oakland, 1989, Commission I, Document on Community Life 3.1.
6. ibid. 2.1.

THE REALITY OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE:

AREAS TO BE EXPLORED

Sister Mary of Mercy, O.P.
Farmington Hills
(Transcription)

I was quite a small child, visiting in the home of my aunt, the night that the Brownell School burned. It was a fascinating but a frightening sight. We were awakened by my older cousin to come down and we could see, through the buildings, the school burning. The response was varied. I think that the grown-ups were a little bit relieved that it burned at night, the wooden staircases and floors. In the morning there was among, of course, the children, a great deal of glee. The school was burned down! They were delighted. But one little philosopher was a little more silent, to their annoyance, and they said, "Well, what's the matter with you, Freddie?" And he said, "It won't do any good. The teachers weren't in it!" And he was right. Some people see more deeply than others and are able to voice what they see.

Twenty-five years ago or so, we were blessed by the voices of Father Walgrave and Father Vicaire, as the Order approached the renewal of its Constitutions. They were able to look into the charism, the grace of Saint Dominic, and look into the history of the Order and perceive both the essentials, the continuity, and the renewal. We benefited from what they saw and what they said to us.

And there are some of us here who had the great grace of the experience of re-writing our Constitutions, refounding our own communities, and it was a thrilling experience because it was something that we no longer did because "this is what we did" but because we had looked into and studied and placed all of the elements there by God's grace.

Now a number of years have elapsed since that time and in the Church there are new voices rising not only in our own Order but outside of it to reassess the situation of religious life today, and we can listen to those voices. Many would be familiar with the recent book of Sister Mary Jo Leddy on re-weaving of the religious life. I'm not advocating "creative disintegration" but perhaps we can be aware of what has been said of religious life buying in too much to the secular culture, being the "instant gratification" people. We can hear the word "radical" but I hope we will interpret it as a more radical living of the Gospel and of our own life.

The voice of Sister Elizabeth McDonough has been present to us, not verbally but on the printed page, but I think it is a very perceptive voice. And she has honestly looked at the

situation of religious life today and seen, perhaps, the danger of entering into the liberal individualism and the psychological selfism. And we should be aware of that voice, that in the age that has now become post-liberal and post-modern, we may not buy into the liberal and modern systems. I don't mean that pessimistically. I think Sister has spoken very well of the need for structures in religious life, and we have been blessed in our own Constitutions because those structures have been preserved -- and I am speaking of the Observances which we have to preserve and use well.

This was illustrated to our community. Our extern Sister told us that in our neighborhood there is an institution for children -- and then they grow up -- who are very grossly, very markedly physically deformed and, as she said, they don't go many places. A Catholic woman working there said, "I realize that we never bring them to church," so she asked if she could come to our monastery one morning. They came for the mid-day prayer and she brought the young people, whom we did not see, but among all of these there was a young lad who seemed perfectly formed. A perfect body ... arms, legs, fingers, and yet he had to be carried in by the nurse and moved about. The reason was because in his limbs, his arms and his legs, the bone structure had never solidified. They were soft and limp, so the limbs were there but they were useless because of a lack of structure. So we can hear Sister Elizabeth's voice on the matter of structure.

We have heard, this morning, Sister Mary Magdalen's voice and we can learn what Sister had to say. The original title of her paper was "Balance of the Elements and Integration." And integration is an area that we can think of and which I had really intended to embark upon, looking for the Observances which we had not studied in the past twenty years or so, and that is the elements of asceticism and enclosure. Possibly why we, and a lot in the Church, were not vocal about asceticism in some of the passing years was because perhaps we had approached asceticism from an attitude of strength, something we were going to do for God, something we were going to kind of control Him with -- and, of course, we need to see asceticism as something which we embrace because of our weakness, out of our weakness. For enclosure, yes. We have moved ... and these are over simplifications, but, let us say, from the word "enclosure" to "withdrawal." But we need to hear "enclosure" as well, as Saint Dominic would want us to hear.

But another voice spoke, I think, a little more urgently and that was that of Father Damian Byrne in the letter that he wrote to us before he left the office of Master of the Order. And I would sum up what he said to us ... I think he used the word "interdependence" or "inter-relatedness," ... and I think that's an area that perhaps needs more urgent exploring, or I hope will be in some way useful.

I would like to look at it through the prism of the other element that Sister Mary Magdalen spoke about this morning as she stressed especially the communio, and that is the missio: communion and mission, our place in the mission of the Order. We remember the letter of Father Anicetus Fernandez at the beginning of our Constitutions stating the essential apostolic relatedness of our life, and he said, not just because we pray or because we make offerings for the mission of the Church but because this is integral to our Order. It is intentional. Intentional on our part, intentional on the part of Saint Dominic -- and if I may presume to say so -- within the providence of God, intentional in the way that God's providence led Saint Dominic.

I had spoken at another time of the centrality of truth in the Order because that was the founding insight, it seems to me, that what Saint Dominic saw in Languedoc was the need for truth. You had among the women who eventually became Dominican nuns that love for God, that zeal, that self-dedication, and yet it was not bearing fruit because of a lack of truth which then Saint Dominic was able to bring. But prior to that and part of our grace is that we know of the charity of Saint Dominic all through his life, the charity that he practiced at Palencia and of which Father Vicaire says the Lord was then to show him a greater need of the people, and then the burning concern for sinners in his cry, "What will become of poor sinners?" And we know that we are to carry that cry of Saint Dominic for the sinners, the poor and the down-trodden in our hearts. I think we have to look at this grace of missio because in it I think we can find a drawing together, an interdependence, an interaction, within our communities in the challenges that we face, in the Conference, and in the Order.

Father Ruane had the kindness to send us a copy of the document from the Chapter of Mexico on the Dominican Family, and he translated a little part of it and sent us the rest in Spanish. And in my wobbly Spanish, a sentence jumped out at me which I may not have translated exactly correctly, but what it said was, "The whole Dominican Family finds its roots in the very life-project and the mission of Saint Dominic." I would say that in the idea which God gave him, in the grace and the mission of Saint Dominic, we find our unity. And of the promotor of the family, it says, "to promote the growth of the Dominican Family, from the unity of the vocation, the charism and the mission." So from that charism and that mission we can look a little bit at our interaction and interdependence in community.

And I'm to look for the areas that we need to focus on. One of them I will call "inculturation." What do I mean by that? The language that we can find within the members of our community to articulate our vision and our living out of the

charism that will bring us together. In an earlier version Sister Mary Magdalen had pointed out -- which I had seen -- but it's very true, that a good number of us were first formed in the former Constitutions, and the younger members that we have did not have that experience. We may be using a different language.

Sister Elizabeth McDonough, in an article that she just printed, speaks about four ages, first of all about people socially and of those in the religious life, and it's very perceptive. She speaks of the elders (67-90), the mid-lifers (48-66), the rising adults (30-47), the youths (9-29). And, interesting, she says the youths seem to relate idealistically more to the elders than to the inner groups. But how to bring this together? The problem is there. And how are we going to bring this together? First of all, we who are a little bit older ... I used the word "inculturation" because I think we need to dialogue in community. I think the answer is in the conversations we now share, in our Chapter discussions, in our common study. Maybe we need a little bit of help in trying to see that the values, the vocation is the same. I will use the example of missio -- even the communio, the communion with God and the communion with others -- it's the same grace but they have experienced it differently. We knew we were coming to love God. We were drawn by Jesus Christ. That's our vocation. And we knew we were doing something for the Church. Probably for a number of us, it articulated itself as the response to either the Perpetual Rosary or the Perpetual Adoration as an outflow of the life, as a support of the life. And these people come in much more socially aware of problems that we didn't even know existed. At the time that I entered we were not that naive. We knew that there were problems but surely not to the scope, precision, the world-wide instant communication of events, the political and social awareness of the young women of today. Yet that awareness has not led these young women to enter the apostolic life but the contemplative ... an awareness that they need to, as one Sister said to me, journey into God and in charity there reach out to the problems of the world. But it's the same vocation and we need to articulate this to one another, that we perceive that at the root, the values are the same. But we may need a little help in doing that. Sister Elizabeth McDonough also made the remark that the senior people have to learn how to disengage the enduring values of the Gospel from the social, cultural, and institutional forms of religious expression of a former age. We may do this without being conscious of it and, of course, as she says, it is for the younger generation to remember that there are enduring values. There are some things we cannot jettison.

The second area within community of course, Sisters, is government. Father Malachy is going to address that, and it would be a great help to us.

We are all aware of the care of the aged. I think a problem is that we should not see the aged as a problem. Do we see them as blessing or, too much maybe, as burden? But the blessing is there, and these are the Sisters who are so fruitful for the Order. Mystical literature has often used the image of the rose. When is the rose at its most precious? It's not the delicate rosebud or even the fragrant, beautiful full-blown bloom. It's that hard, brown, dried up knob that's left at the end of the season which, when it is broken up by God's winter, brings fruit. So we must treasure our aged Sisters and listen to them as we try to provide for them, and we will need to discuss this. We are all well aware of the challenge. But we need to remember the treasure, and our elders need to be aware that we need them and that the Church needs them, and that they are living the root of our life, still called to be earnest and alive in *communio* and *missio*. They are living their stage of life for the people in the world. This is, for them and for us, our pro-life stance, the reverence and the holy providing and the patience and the waiting for God and the fruitfulness for the Church, for those Sisters.

What about our interdependence as a Conference and how can we see that in *missio*? Father Byrne mentions the question of a common novitiate. We haven't thought that way so far. I would like to articulate this, Sisters, that I think one of the great successes of our Conference is that we moved gradually. We didn't form a federation because we said, "Let's have a Conference and let's see how it goes. Let's let it grow." Can we look at what is already in our Constitutions? Surely a Sister may be sent to another monastery for her novitiate or part of it, and this has been done. Surely a certain level of vitality should be present in a monastery before, in justice, a young woman should be allowed to make her formation there and dedicate her whole life to the Lord.

But I think we can look at Constitution #141, which we already have in our Constitutions, which says that a group of novices may spend a determined time in another monastery of the Order with the consent of each of the prioresses. We who have experienced the reality of the Theological Formation Program I think have found that very valuable. First of all, that the Sisters receive the solid input that they did from our Fathers, but also the experience of being with women at their own stage of formation and very often near their own age group has been very helpful and formative for the Sisters. Could we think that way, perhaps, in the novitiate context of some time of coming together in a monastery for formation under the guidance of one of our Fathers or one of the mistresses who are facing the fact that there is a great deal of reading and preparation to be done and might wish to help one another in this way? This is just a suggestion.

Information for Government -- this has already been proposed -- of guidance perhaps for the prioresses, and we would be glad to have it and we could use it, to come together. Even as far back as Saint Basil, in his Long Rules (Rule #54) he mentions that the superiors should come together and talk this all out. And I think that would be a great service that the Conference could provide for the prioresses as well as for others, either in leadership or even for the work of the Chapter.

The help given to one or other of monasteries: in Father Byrne's paper he mentions the suggestion of one of the nuns of the possibility of perhaps two smaller monasteries founding an entirely new entity. As the Conference, we do not reach into the area of government or decision-making of any of the monasteries and that is not the intention, but do we wish to give to the Conference any ways to help a monastery who so requests it?

Now I would like to speak a little bit about interaction within the Order, flowing from our very identity. And it has to be from our own identity and from our diversity within the Order that we can best serve it. We have to know well our Dominican contemplative identity, that it remains that of the purely contemplative life to which we have been called and that the giving of life, the sharing of life, with the other branches of the Order must come out essentially and primarily of the very living of our own life. Sister Mary Magdalen, in looking at the aspect of communio, leafed through our Constitutions and I could do it similarly in examining the concept of missio.

We have in Constitution #1, "these women Saint Dominic associated with the holy preaching by prayer and penance." Later on ... "spending themselves totally for souls, with one charity, one mercy, the friars, the Sisters and the laity preach the Lord Jesus Christ throughout the world. The nuns seek, ponder, and call upon him in solitude so that the Word may accomplish what it has been sent to do."

In the Common Life (#2 and 3) we read: "the unity in the monastery transcends the limits and attains its fulness in communion with the Order and with the whole Church, living in harmony, having one mind and one heart in God." Again ... "the unanimity there would furnish an example of that reconciliation of all things in Christ which our brethren proclaim in their preaching." If we cannot live reconciliation within our own midst, then we cannot further the reconciliation of the Order. We "must first build in our own monasteries the Church of God which we help to spread by the offering of ourselves."

This aspect, too, is present as we live out our vows and it is an aspect that speaks to the heart of the younger generations. The Constitution delineates it this way (cf. obedience, #19): "By this vow the nuns ... cooperate in the work of redemption ... the labors and renunciations which it entails ... and take on the character of sacrifice for the Church." Regarding chastity (#24) we find: "by our self-offering we may cooperate in the work of human regeneration." And we are assured that by our poverty (#28) "we cooperate in the ministry of our brethren" and we are challenged to give a corporate witness before the world by working diligently, living frugally, sharing generously. Other texts might be added, but let us not overlook this lovely phrase in #35: "the nuns, while living in harmony ... are a sign of that blessed city, Jerusalem, which the brethren build up by their preaching" and, loveliest of all, "In the cloister the nuns ... perpetuate the singular gift which the blessed Father had of bearing sinners, the downtrodden and the afflicted in the inmost sanctuary of his compassion." That charism of contemplative, compassionate missio is God's gift to us.

So it is from that contemplative core, from the very essence of our life primarily, which we relate to the Church and primarily relate to the priorities of the Order which Father Byrne has mentioned: evangelizing those who do not believe in Jesus, inculturation, studying and preaching the gospel, identification with the poor, involvement in social communications and above all, as I mentioned, by living that reality within the context of our own lives. Sometimes we are, perhaps, struggling to believe. We have and we are the poor in our own midst but we must be mindful of these priorities and of the Order living on the frontiers. As one of our nuns expressed it, "I would like to see these four priorities woven into the fabric of our lives and our considerations, our prayer, our daily reflection during our walk with Jesus, through our cloisters, through our work, through our gardens and our woods, into our chapels."

From our essential reality: are there other ways in which we would interact with the Order? We are aware, of course, of the German mystics and the interrelationship there. It was in 1286 or 1287 that Herman Minden, the Prior Provincial of Germany, requested that the Friars Preachers become involved in the monasteries of nuns of the Order, and he said that these had to be "fratres docti." And we know the work of Eckhart, Suso, and Tauler. And there was an inter-nourishing in them. "In the nuns, the friars met a very lively audience that was inspiring to the preacher, with a developed mystical experience, open-minded and seriously committed to a life of voluntary poverty and to fellowship with Christ according to the spirit of the Gospel. These nuns were very eager listeners, eager in that their desire for a truly spiritual life was intense."

There is an article by Sister Raphaela Gasser in a recent "Dominican Ashram," in which she mentions that the interaction there was really through the needs of the nuns of Zurich which called forth a lot of the writings of Tauler and Eckhart, and questions whether Henry Suso would have begun the writings in which he engaged if it was not for Elsbeth for whom often he wrote.

In other ways, of course, we have been interrelated. The Fathers have helped us so much with formation, and as Eckhart's and Suso's and Tauler's lives were touched so much by the nuns, I'm sure Father Gabriel has found his touched -- and often impinged upon -- by us.

We have been examining the interaction within the Order and ways we might interact, and you will have others to articulate. We had a very unusual one, one quite practical one. With the rather full infirmary, one of our Sisters was hospitalized and was going to have rather dramatic needs for a few months which we simply could not handle. I had had the very kind offer, a year before, of Sister Carmelita Murphy from the Grand Rapids Sisters, that if ever there was a need, they would help us in this way in caring for one of our Sisters. It was something I never thought I would have to do but I remembered her offer when the occasion came, and the Sisters have been very gracious with our Sister who has been there two months now and will be there another because we are enlarging our infirmary. But it has proved to be a very beautiful experience of seeing the dear Sisters in the Grand Rapids infirmary and their response to us.

With our Dominican Friars in Grand Rapids, there is a growing friendship as well. The small community has been coming once or twice a year to spend their day of recollection and reflection at the Monastery. Now they have proposed a new initiative -- a day of joint study, friars and nuns studying and sharing together. At the end of October we will celebrate such a day reflecting on St. Matthew's Gospel. It is a new way of interaction and enrichment. We had never thought of that before.

But primarily our charism in missio is in the essential living of the life -- because this is of the essence of our life, to be the purely contemplative life -- and certainly there are ways of overflowing into the interaction within the Order. Mission for us nuns ... we all have it in the correspondence of those who write to our monasteries and in the work of our monastic musicians and artisans and, much more simply, in the people who come to find the peace of our chapels or to share in our liturgies and who appreciate this so much.

I wanted to say one more word about missio because I think it can inspire us, and I would like to see us articulate it in our Constitutions. In the Gospel we have the words, "hearing the word of God and keeping it." Now who but Dominicans would have the boldness to stick a word in there and say, in our Constitutions, "hearing the word, studying the word and keeping the word." And I think we need to say also "proclaiming the word," preaching the word, but from our own essential identity. And I think we should articulate that in our Constitutions, Sisters, in the final chapter which, as our Constitutions parallels that of the Fathers', should pertain to "mission." I think this is how we should articulate our mission, certainly not only in our manual work, noble as it will be -- and Sister Mary Magdalen (Farmington Hills) will tell us about that -- but that is an Observance. Place it there. That is not our work, our missio. In speaking of the contemplative life, Saint Thomas says that it is of the essence of the contemplative life that it is by the same Observances, by the very same elements with which we serve God and worship God, that we serve the Church. I think we need to articulate what is our Dominican contemplative identity in mission because it is part of our charism, part of the charism that Saint Dominic gave us, part of our identity. But it must be truly our identity as nuns of the purely contemplative life, and it can guide our interaction in community, in the Conference, and within the whole Order.

I'd like to make two remarks in conclusion. A number of years ago -- and I don't remember the specifics -- there was a convention of psychiatrists and one of the men was giving a presentation. He was speaking about the psychoanalytical use of the free association of ideas, and he took a very famous historical character -- literary or political, I don't remember -- very renowned, very esteemed. And he psychoanalyzed this person from the free association of ideas, and brought forth a person very Freudian, sexually obsessed, very bitter, violent and reactive. There was silence when he finished his presentation for a few moments and then one of the doctors who was a Catholic stood up and thanked him for his presentation. He said it was brilliantly carried out and most interesting, but he said, "There is a principle we have to remember in psychoanalysis, that the free association must be that of the patient and not of the doctor." So, he says, "You may have analyzed yourself." So as I have pointed out the problems, I may have analyzed myself.

One more challenge I think we need to place before ourselves and that is hope. Sister Mary Magdalen courageously says, "the dreams before us" and we want to see them that way and, I admit, they are dreams and we must trust in God's providence. But it's a little bit scary and so I think we have to approach them in hope. To the twenty-first century we look, that is true, but it is "today" we must live. "Today" is the moment of grace, the *kairos*. We trust that the God who has been with us this far will be with us until the end.

RECLAIMING THE DOMINICAN VISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY:
A CHALLENGE FOR AGING CONTEMPLATIVE COMMUNITIES

Bro. Ignatius Perkins, OP, DNSc, RN,
 25 September 1992

INTRODUCTION

Since the earliest days of the Order, our communities have provided care for our sick, the aging, and dying sisters and brothers. Our Father Dominic, as "consoler of the sick and of those who were in distress" (Constitutions of the Order of Preachers, #9), cared for his brothers with great compassion and tenderness. Following the model of St. Dominic, caring for one another in community provides the unique opportunity where the living expression of Dominican life bonds us together in the Lord. It is in this context that the expression of our love and care for one another, united in our common mission of preaching, can truly be a countersign to the world seeking meaning and salvation. As St. Dominic's life serves as a role model for us, we too must serve as role models, by showing others that we take reasonable care of ourselves and especially one another in our old age, respecting life as a good which we hold in honor, since God created it and will raise it up on the last day.

TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Religious communities today face unprecedented challenges but especially new opportunities in caring for a growing number of elderly members. Life expectancy has steadily increased. Infectious diseases have been well controlled by the use of antibiotics. Mortality from chronic diseases has been dramatically reduced through the use of sophisticated drugs and diagnostic procedures. While we have received the benefits of new healthcare technologies, death from cancer and heart disease continues to take some of our sisters and brothers at early ages. Longevity in some of our members is accompanied by increased functional dependence, the dementias and a greater need for nursing and health care services.

Making decisions about health and nursing care for the sisters, caring for difficult persons in the community, affirming those who are fearful and depressed, discerning the benefits and burden of treatment, placement of a sister in a long term healthcare center, and enabling the continued development of your community's psychological, physical, and spiritual wellness as it fulfills its Mission, are your special responsibilities as leaders in your communities.

Needed resources to assure the continued Mission of your community in the Church while providing an appropriate level of care -human - financial -and environmental - tests the strength of our community bonds, our ingenuity, and especially our faith in a loving Father who wants only good for His children. You are indeed no strangers to these challenges inherent in your role. But, for the moment, remember: though there are those in your communities who believe you can walk on water, can leap over tall buildings in a single bound and have the facility to talk to God directly, you too have needs and limits. So as you work to enable the continued growth of your communities in all of their human and spiritual dimensions, remember your own need for quiet time, for prayer, for leisure, for rest and for some humor too!

AGING IN COMMUNITY

Aging in community or aging in place, as the professional literature describes it today, is one of your special concerns addressed in this Assembly. Discussions about health and aging, while a very important strategic aspect in your effort in "reclaiming the Dominican vision" can evoke reactions of fear, resentment, anxiety, and denial.

The possibility of slowing down in our later years is considered by some of us as inconceivable and inappropriate for religious. It can be rightly stated - we have been called to serve - not until a certain age - but for the whole of our lives. Still, some of us welcome the time when the pressures of administration and serving the community in leadership roles can be given to others. Do we still believe that our value and worth in the community is measured only by productive work? Can we really be free and welcome the time when the pressure to be efficient and meet demanding schedules of the community and the ministry can be exchanged for more opportunities to develop the contemplative character of Dominican life?

Henri Nouwen, in his book entitled Aging the Fulfillment of Life, (1974) describes aging as the most common human experience which overarches the human community. It is an experience so profoundly human that it breaks through the artificial boundaries between childhood and adulthood, and between adulthood and old age. Aging is not a reason for despair but a basis for hope, not a slow decaying but a gradual maturing, not a fate to be undergone, but a chance to be embraced. Aging does not need to be denied, but can be understood, affirmed and experienced as a process of growth and development by which the mystery of life and redemption is slowly revealed to us. Those of us who are old, or middle-aged, or young, as well as those of us who care for the old, need to find each other in the common experience of aging, out of which healing and new life can come forth. We can never be fully present to the elderly if we continue to hide from our own aging. As Nouwen notes, we need to allow the old person to awaken in ourselves.

As Dominicans each of us shares a common bond with all humanity, namely, the progressive achievement of full personality in an ongoing process from conception to the grave. Aging, then, is a normal life-long event, separate and distinct from illness. Our perceptions of aging and the elderly are influenced by our cultural and familial experiences and attitudes, personal habits, our Dominican life, and the expectations and responsibilities as preachers in today's world.

In our lives as Dominicans, the positive and creative awareness of aging and fulfillment in ourselves and those of our communities is familiar and noteworthy. Experiences of rejection, isolation, and being marginalized in the community may have particular meaning for some of our elderly. How attentive have we been to the developing needs of the aging person awakening within ourselves and in those with whom we live? Have you thought about your own aging and its effect on your own personal and spiritual maturation? Can you see beauty in the aging process occurring among your Sisters? Have you found that you have been

impatient with an elderly Sister when repeating instructions dozens of times each day? Did you allow your elderly Sister to share with you an important part of her history even though you have heard the same story hundreds of times? Why were you able to recognize the need for relief of arthritic pain in one Sister but failed to recognize the psychological pain and depression expressed by an elderly sister who is experiencing an increasing degree of confusion and uncertainty?

There was little, in times past, in our formation programs which provided a conscious preparation for our own aging during our later years. This absence is not peculiar to your Dominican contemplative life but reflects the careless drift of the larger society to which we belong. As Dominican women you too have been affected by the philosophy and efficiency of the work ethic. Perhaps a special factor influencing our hesitancy about preparing for our later years has been the assurance that our basic needs for survival and security would be fulfilled. As a result, waiting for directions from superiors and passive acceptance of inactivity, adjoined with the normal frailties of aging can contribute to the development of feelings of loneliness, apathy and uselessness.

Preparing for our later years involves careful discernment about our continuing commitment as Dominican religious in today's world. We have all been called to proclaim the gospel by word and deed to one another and to the community of the Church. While our ministry of preaching may assume difference forms, we remain committed by our solemn profession, a commitment which is completely and perpetually joined to the life and mission of Christ (Basic Constitutions).

To reverse negative attitudes among the sisters, there is need to include study and acquire practical experience in understanding the process of aging and its implications for community life and ministry, especially when the number of our elderly sisters continues to increase. This is a particularly important value to be incorporated in our formation programs so that from the very beginning our younger sisters develop an understanding of the particular needs of the elderly and an appreciation and understanding of how vital are their continued contributions to the Mission of their monastery and to the Church.

Understanding and appreciation for the commitment of our older sisters to the life of the community and our ministry of preaching is a significant aspect of a fruitful community life for sisters of all ages. Formation programs should make every effort to integrate principles and concepts on the aging process into the formative experience of the younger sisters. Senior sisters also need the opportunity to gain a better understanding and appreciation of their own aging process.

Through personal and ongoing community development, sisters can acquire a greater understanding of the intergenerational dynamics operative in a community and what it means to become older, wiser and happy together. Facilitation in identifying the gifts of each sister

from the youngest to the oldest and especially to reverence the differences in one another's values, educational achievements, culture experiences and contribution to the Church are important aspects of a healthy community.

CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER

The challenge very close to us these days is caring for the sick and the elderly. You do indeed have great compassion for the sick and the elderly in your monasteries. I can speak from personal experiences where I have witnessed the care and compassion given to those who need to experience the healing mission of Jesus. Your monasteries are holy places and your care of the sick and the elderly is a truly sacred work.

Some of you may agree that your centers of care are not the most elaborately furnished with state-of-the-art equipment. Hardware which can minimize the physical strain on patients and caregivers is not always immediately available. Some quarters are small leaving few options for storage of needed equipment and supplies. Designers of health care facilities and equipment would see our infirmaries as architectural wonders to be challenged.

Most important, however, your centers of care are richly endowed with love and compassion. These centers of love and hope are an integral part of your home - the same home for many sisters for multiple decades. What may be lacking in conveniences is abundantly rich with creative alternatives to care for the sick and elderly within the environment of a Dominican community. And you must be commended for the efforts you are making in providing care at home. No wonder, then, there is resistance to change, to bringing in outsiders to help care for the sick, or to even considering the possibility of sending a sister to another place for care.

Your elderly sisters, like others in society, experience loss and grieve over major changes in their lives. They see their own health and that of others in a state of decline. They cannot walk as easily nor can they work as long and as hard as in earlier years. They know well of the number of duties which now must be shared by a fewer number of younger sisters. Have you not heard the concerns voiced by an infirmed sister about her feelings of the burden she imposes on others while they care for her? Did you hear the frustrations of your infirmarian who finds it increasingly stressful to care for an uncooperative patient but expresses guilt when she becomes impatient with the burden of care?

Some of you have served in the role of infirmarian, so you know well the burdens carried by those who minister to the sick: the long hours, the interrupted nights, and occasional misunderstanding and criticism of the infirmarian as she implements a specific nursing care plan for the sick and the dying. How have you managed to balance these concerns so the needs of the caregiver and the carereceiver and the common good of the community can be met?

These are only a few of the many questions which come to mind as

together we raise some of the important issues and concerns about the needs of the sick and the elderly who walk among you and those who care for them. I submit, however, that these questions are not new for you. In enunciating these questions I want you to be comforted in knowing that these concerns affect all of our communities. It is in understanding our common experiences that we can bring to one another enormous resources and mutual support in responding to these unique challenges and unique opportunities for securing the Mission of our Order into the 2000's.

RECLAIMING THE VISION

Your theme for the 1992 General Assembly is quite appropriate as you undertake a strategic initiative in planning for the 2000's. Your coming together in this forum for some years now and through other collaborative initiatives, is a visible and noble example of how you value Dominican interdependence in enabling one another to fulfill your common mission as contemplative Dominican women. Call it collaboration, cooperation, enabling, interdependence, synergy, sharing, simply put, it means you both want and need one another's mutual support and confidence as we move into our next century of ministry.

What practical initiatives can be identified which will respond to the challenges we all face in caring for one another with compassion and understanding. Permit me to identify several ideas which I am sure will be more fully elaborated during our discussion:

1. I believe it is important for all members of the community to understand that planning and decisions about a program for caring for our elderly members is not reserved to the prioress or the infirmarian. The entire community needs to understand their responsibility in this common call to care for one another and to actively participate in all aspects of "reclaiming the vision."
2. Use of nursing resources outside the community in providing care for the sisters in the monasteries has been tried with a certain degree of success. Use of these resources has reduced the burden of the sisters in providing care twenty-four hours each day. The concern voiced by sisters about "outsiders" coming into the monastery should be addressed by the entire community. While it is important to protect the spirit of the monastery, our lay employees should be considered as collaborators in the Mission. In their roles, they provide enormous service for us. The grace that you receive in caring for the sick, the elderly and the dying is also shared and experienced by the nursing staff as they follow your prescriptions for love, for compassion and for nursing care.

Cost for support services for the community, however, can place a drain on the already limited resources of the monastery. The community should be kept informed about healthcare costs since this information can help improve stewardship of our resources.

3. Admitting sisters to the infirmaries of other religious communities has also been successful. Where arrangements can be made, especially with Dominican congregations, these need to be encouraged and further developed.

Criticism from some members of our communities, especially about sending our sick and elderly to other places for care at one of the most vulnerable moments in their lives, is a cause of concern for communities and a source of stress for community leaders. In some situations, placing the dilemma before the entire community has helped identify the many complex issues which undergird the initial resistance to giving responsibility for care of our sick to others.

As you may well imagine, objections to sending a sister to another center for care, at times, has little to do with this sister's need at the moment. The roots of the objections take many forms, for example, denial of the aging process; fear of being sent away if I should need nursing care; loss of a long loved sister; etc.

4. Securing the professional services of a geriatric nurse practitioner to provide consultation on the care of the sisters at home can enhance the quality of your home care program and provide an immediate resource for the infirmarian in making assessments and planning nursing interventions. Physicians are helpful but they know little about planning nursing care for the elderly.
5. Over these past few years there has been some informal discussion about the need to preserve the contemplative vocation and consider sending our sisters to one or a few regionally designated monasteries for care. From your own experience you know well the resistance to giving up your sisters to others for care. You also know the expense of providing care, not only in terms of dollars, but also the human resources needed to provide care over the long term. Without the assurance of a critical mass of patients, operational costs can quickly become unmanageable.

OUR CHALLENGE:

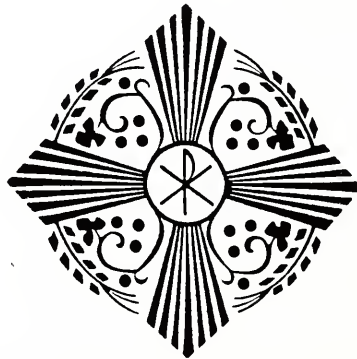
How are we to responsibly address these competing values and concepts? What is the Lord asking us to give up or to take on as we address the care of one another?

Our Mission of Caring is clear: caring about ourselves and for one another is a challenge to be embraced and accepted, never a problem or a burden to be endured. Through our caring with compassion we bring the healing ministry of Jesus Christ to one another. In this way we preach and care for each other at very special moments in our Dominican lives. Our community life, as Fr. Damian Byrne noted in early writings, is our first preaching; it is a prophetic witness to and an authenticating sign of what we communicate by word of mouth.

To fulfill our Mission of Caring, and to "reclaim the Dominican Vision for the 21st Century", requires strategic prayer,

thinking, and planning. In this effort we need to call one another to the generous and courageous acceptance of all the demands which community life makes of us: good stewards of our personal health, accountability for the use of our resources, caring for our sisters who are troubled and in distress, affirmation and reverence of our elderly sisters, compassionate care for those suffering with terminal diseases and being present with the dying. This is the healing ministry of Jesus Christ; it must also be our own ministry to one another!

Thank you.



WORK

ITS MEANING AND VALUE FOR CONTEMPORARY DOMINICAN MONASTIC LIFE

Sr. Mary Magdalen, O.P.
Farmington

"They gazed on God; they ate and they drank" (Ex 24:11b).

This is not a description of the abbas and ammas of Skete or Nitria or the Cells. It belongs, as everyone knows, to an account of the primitive theophany at Sinai. But I would like to propose it as a valid paradigm for the monastic enterprise. We are seekers after God; but we do spend an impressive part of our lifetime and devote tremendous energies to involvement with earthly realities.

In developing a theology of work, M. D. Chenu, O.P., sets up the problem as follows: "We must understand the nature of work and its human and material origins in order to appreciate its internal laws and its spiritual needs from a Christian standpoint." Let me begin, then, by taking some glimpses into the history of thought on the subject of work.

I. SOME HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS

In her book, *THE HUMAN CONDITION*, Hannah Arendt proposes a distinction between labor and work based on the etymology of those two words as they have appeared in every human language, ancient and modern. "Work" referred to the activity or production of the artist or artisan/craftsman, while "labor" meant bodily toil for the necessities of life.¹ These short and incomplete historical notes are intended to highlight points of importance for a consideration of work in monasticism.

In classic Greek society, bodily toil or labor was intimately bound up with the necessities of life; it was subject to necessity, and was relegated to slaves and tame animals. Craftsmen, artists and artisans were differentiated in relation to the amount of effort expended, that being the meanest which required the greatest expenditure of bodily strength. Thus, sculptors were ranked beneath painters, the genius of the immortal Phidias notwithstanding. For the Greeks, freedom was opposed to necessity and, therefore, those who labored for the necessities of life were "in bondage" to necessity. It was on account of the work they did that laborers were slaves, such work being unworthy of free persons. The only work really worthy of free persons was a life devoted to the affairs of the city-state, or politics. In time, the vita-activa (life of activity) was reckoned among the necessities of life and, for both Plato and Aristotle, all human activities were subordinate to contemplation and the philosophical consideration of truth.

Christianity introduced, I think, a decisive change in the history of human consideration of work and labor, by the very fact that Christ the Lord took upon himself a life of humble work. Monasticism tended to be counter-cultural. The appreciation of the monks for manual labor as well as their classless society are instances of this.

The transition to a market economy in the late middle ages, as Hannah Arendt says, engendered a shift in values and a new distinction: that between productive and unproductive labor. In later centuries, there was further differentiation between skilled and unskilled work and finally that between

manual and intellectual labor.

For Karl Marx, perhaps the greatest of modern labor theorists, the social existence of the human person overshadows individual existence. When labor is "socialized" and becomes "labor-power" it is then capable of tremendous productivity. This marks a crucial turning-point in the history of human work, concomitant with the introduction of industrialization and automation. In addition, the modern division of labor in assembly-line work tends to blur, in some ways, the distinction between skilled and unskilled labor. In today's society, a shift in esteem for relative importance of intellectual versus manual work is reflected in the wage-scale in some sectors of public life.

The concept of human self-alienation, according to Copleston, did not originate with Marx, but Marx located it in the work experience and made the term famous.³ For Marx, it is precisely in the objectifying of self in what one produces, that is, in work, that the self-alienation of the human person comes about, because what is produced belongs not to the worker but to someone else. (This, of course, is the reason for the Marxist hatred of the capitalist system.)

II. WORK, DUALISM AND SELF-ALIENATION

We have witnessed the failure of dialectical materialism as a political program, but I think the existential reality of human self-alienation remains, and I think Marx is correct in identifying it within the experience of work. How often do we not say: "She puts her whole self into whatever she does." Particularly when work is creative in some way, for example, organizing a department or arranging and furnishing an infirmary, we care, and care intensely, about how we do things. We invest a tremendous amount of energy and hours over a lifetime, on things. But things are transient; they pass away. Hence, the self-alienation. The ambiguity of our situation is even more apparent in view of monastic respect for wholehearted dedication to the task at hand, whatever it may be. This line of thought might lead me to say that between my "spiritual" self and the "things" I work at there lies a gap, an abyss, a chasm which no intentionality can bridge. But, in developing his theology of work, Fr. Chenu takes issue at the outset with this "gap" which can be called anthropological dualism, or Neo-Platonic dualism, or just plain dualism. For many years, I have experienced this self-alienation in my work, probably because I've been a potter and a sculptor and a maintenance person, as well as a seeker after God. It seems to me that the concept of dualism has important consequences for work as well as for spirituality.

Dualism, of course, is the affirmation of two principles: matter and spirit, and matter versus spirit. For Plotinus, God is transcendent, pure, One, utterly simple. He is to be reached by separation from all that is earthly, bodily, material, multiple. (You can see the implications for work, and again, the idea of alienation.) The physical universe in all its beauty is not understood as imaging back to its Creator. It is, rather, multiplicity, distracting from the One.

I find a strain of Neo-Platonic thought in Christianity from earliest times right to the present. It seems to me that Christian mysticism owes much to the thought of Plotinus, which has influenced Origen, Evagrius, the Cappadocians, Pseudo-Dionysius, Augustine, and others. This same strain of thought appears in the

Middle Ages, for example in John Scotus Eriugena; later, in Eckhart and the Rhineland mystics.

We find dualistic thought at its low level, "matter is evil", in the Albigensians, and later in Quietism and Jansenism, whence some influences have filtered into the Post-Tridentine religious foundations and into the re-foundations, including the Dominican nuns.

We see this same thought affecting our thinking about work when we say that what we do is unimportant "because it's not spiritual"; it is important only as an occasion for merit or for its moral dimension. Listen to it now, in the monastic literature, in the *Apothegms of the Fathers*: "It was said of her (Amma Sarah) that for sixty years she lived beside a river and never lifted her eyes to look at it."⁵ And again:

One day a brother came to Abba John to take away some baskets [to market them for the old man]. He came out and said to him, "What do you want, brother?" He said, "Baskets, abba." Going inside to bring them to him, he forgot them, and sat down to weave. [This happened three times.] Then, taking him by the hand, Abba John led him inside, saying, "If you want the baskets, take them and go away, because really, I have no time for such things."⁶

According to this orientation, the religious quest is, after all, a quest for "higher things"; in the end we will slough off the body and the work of our hands, and the unimpeded spirit will rise to be united to the Godhead. But doesn't this perception remove us from the full scope of the Incarnation of God, from created reality, and from history? It says that between ourselves and the work of our hands, as well as the physical universe, there is no real connection; there is only a moral and ethical one. Such thinking, it seems to me, betrays a lack of respect for the ontological being of the world we live in, and it leaves (some of us) with the unresolved experience of alienation.

III. THE OBJECTIVE DIMENSION The Eschatological Finality of Earthly Realities

All of this section is simply to say that what we do and how we do it does indeed have meaning and value. After all, as God made matter and things, he would stop and admire and pronounce them "good." "Far from being remote, God is immediate to us in our very materiality."⁷

St. Irenaeus gives us a golden formula: "God created matter in time, in order that man, nurtured in matter, should crown it with immortality."⁸ What bridges the gap between spirit and matter or between humans and the cosmos is the human person, body-spirit composite, in wholeness and integrity. We expend vast amounts of time and energy on matter and the world of sense. And the teaching of Vatican II is clear: "To believers, this point is settled: considered in itself, such human activity accords with God's will...."⁹

Evidence abounds in the monastic tradition, right alongside Neo-Platonism, for what we sometimes call "the Aristotelian view" (which later became the Aristote-

lian/Thomistic synthesis)--a much more holistic treatment of human existence. We see Anthony the Great emerging at the age of fifty-five from twenty years' struggle with the demons, in peak physical condition, having attained (as far as possible) to the state of humanity before the Fall. Again, at the end of his life, the Father of Monks retires to the "Interior Mountain" to prepare for death, but he plants a vegetable garden "in order to have something to feed his guests."¹⁰ That is, the human body and the physical universe are portrayed as good and worthwhile.

Note that things are to be related to God through humanity, or through the human person. Moreover, as Pope John Paul II teaches in *Laborem Exercens*, humans image God as creator in that he has left to us a part of his own work to finish. "Humans share by their work in the activity of the creator...and in a sense continue to develop that activity."¹¹ Not only that, but we have the promise of "a new heavens and a new earth" (Rv 21:1). "The freedom in glory for which the new man, the child of God...waits, is what has been promised; and in this promise even the body...even the world, share,"¹² says Karl Barth in his beautiful exegesis of the eighth chapter of Romans. And again, "the whole universe is destined to eschatological participation in the glory of Christ."¹³

I want to affirm the goodness of the sensible world which we humans, for good and for ill, have done so much to transform. Fr. Chenu has it: "...Christ recapitulates in [hu]man[s] the whole of reality,...all creation enters in some way, through the glorification of the sons [and daughters] of God, into the economy of salvation."¹⁴ This holistic doctrine takes into account all the fruits of human genius, all the work of artists and artisans as well as that child of human imagination--the computer. Finally, Pope John Paul II proclaims that Christ, the man of work, "has appreciation and respect for human work, ..he looks with love upon human work and the different forms that it takes."¹⁵ Is not this perspective an affirmation of the part that monastics have traditionally played in the development of human culture? And can we not include here, the reverence for creation implied for us in the present period of history: that is, concern for the environment and support for ecological advances?

IV. THE SUBJECTIVE DIMENSION

The change in thought about work (referred to earlier) which Christianity introduces, seems not to have been understood or appreciated fully, until the advent of the social teaching of the modern popes. Even today, within the Church and secular society as well, this teaching awaits recognition and will not be easily implemented. Pope John Paul sounds revolutionary as he insists repeatedly,

as a person, man is...the subject of work...[T]he primary basis of the value of work is man himself, who is its subject....[In] the first place, work is "for man" and not man "for work." Through this conclusion one rightly comes to recognize the preeminence of the subjective meaning of work over the objective one.... [E]ach sort [of work, he goes on to say] is judged above all by the measure of the dignity of the subject of work, that is to say, the person, the individual who carries it out....[I]t is always man who is the purpose

of the work...even if the common scale of values rates it as the merest "service," as the most monotonous, even the most alienating.¹⁶

The name of the "subjective factor" in monastic work should be, I submit, human development. Developmental psychologists postulate certain stages in the human life cycle, for each of which there exists a task to be accomplished for the growth of the human person into full maturity. Happiness at the end of life depends on the generosity with which one negotiates these successive stages.¹⁷ This is not to suggest that those responsible for assigning work in the monastery must tailor the task to each individual's supposed stage of development. Rather it is to say that there should be an awareness of the potential of work for contributing to the moral and psychological maturity and the human balance called for by our Constitutions (cf. LCM 25, II; 26, IV; and 105 I). These echo Gaudium et Spes (#67) of Vatican II, when they draw attention to the exercise of the "powers of mind and heart" and the enhancing of the "gifts of nature and grace" as we give ourselves to our work (LCM 104). Responsibility for one's own work and utilization of each one's gifts within the framework of the common good provide realistic impetus for personal growth (cf. LCM 20 II). And the call to service prevents a narcissistic preoccupation with one's own development.

From her hands-on experience of factory work, Simone Weil, though pre-dating the Pope some forty-five years, fleshes out his insistence on the preeminence of the subjective factor: "...these actions must all serve to realize his humanity."¹⁸ Simone wanted a thorough study of the instruments of labor, no longer from the technical point of view, but "from that of their relation to the human person and to human thought." She wrote that

work, in order to become that of a free person, must be pervaded by thought, invention, and judgment. One must therefore find machines of a different kind...considering them not only in terms of their efficiency, but also in terms of how much thought they permit or demand of the worker.¹⁹

In this context, may I suggest that the choice of "work which supplies the necessities of life for the monastery" (LCM 107, I) be not too "narrowly specialized, monotonous, and depersonalizing."²⁰

Also, can we hope that the monastic work which might be chosen would be of a kind which contributes useful or necessary items or services, rather than marketing luxury items in a society already sated with consumer goods? This, admittedly an ideal, would seem to be in keeping with LCM 31, which demands of us a solidarity with the working poor, and with the Order's "preferential option for the poor."

V. THE EFFECTS OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY ON MONASTIC WORK

"The Cistercian [read: Dominican monastic] life is energetic," says Thomas Merton.

There are tides of vitality running through the whole community that generate energy even in people who are lazy. And here at Gethsemani we are at the same time

Cistercians and Americans. It is in some respects a dangerous combination. Our energy runs away with us. We go out to work like a college football team taking the field.¹¹

It would be hard to overestimate the tyranny of the clock in our contemporary Western culture. The pace of modern life in industrialized societies probably needs no description even in this gathering. Someone from a small town visiting Canada's mega-metropolis, Toronto, asked, at a subway station, "Who is chasing all those people?" What should be noted is that this frenetic pace has invaded the monasteries. Beginning the day at cock-crow, in earlier societies, allowed for significant variation according to the amount of adrenalin in one's own or the neighbor's bird. Times for doing things would have varied with the seasons. Primitive war and agriculture allowed for significant "times off" or periods of leisure. The number of holy days or holidays boggle the modern mind: 175 holidays were observed annually in 4th century Rome!¹² And Rahner tells us:

Work itself contained the unexpected and unplanned-for; it was always open to the novel intervention, it did not of itself prescribe a fixed rate of procedure. It could easily be adapted to men's moods; they could sing at it, talk to each other, sit more loosely to it by taking short rests or performing civic or religious rites and so on.¹³

If the demon that pursues monastics in the late twentieth century can be given a name, that name, I think, should be the one Anne Lindberg offers: *zerrissenheit*, "torn-to-pieces-hood."¹⁴ If we take Evagrius's famous description of *acedia* (in the twelfth chapter of the *Praktikos*) and fill in all those gaps in the monk's long, slow day with work, activity, hustle and bustle, we have a picture of the hyperactive, workaholic nun. There is no laziness here, but there is no time for study, *lectio*, or quiet prayer either.¹⁵

In our own day, perhaps the chief damage inflicted upon the monastic ethos by labor-saving devices is the erosion of prayer at work. We accomplish so much more without really doing it. We push buttons and go away and do other things and come back and the job is done. Automation tends to steal away the intervals, those precious bits of time-between. The temptation is strong to make use of the odd moments to push yet another button and get yet another job done, instead of falling back into one's primordial freedom and meeting the Lord in the inner spaces of the heart.

What Thomas Merton suggests to me is that, underneath their habits, American monastics are still "Junior/Senior American Achievers." The question is, can we be a part of our historical moment and our culture and still preserve monastic values? If efficiency, accomplishment, achievement, are the gods of activism, then it seems to me that the monastic response to the American work ethic is the same as our response to the world, i.e., love what is good in it, resist what is futile and false and alien. The recovery of the meaning and value of work for contemporary monastic life might require the paradoxical strategy of simply reducing it: declare a free day once a week and investigate the benefits of leisure.¹⁶ Someone questioned Abba Biare in these words, "What shall I do to be saved?" He replied, "Go, reduce your appetite and your manual work, dwell

without care in your cell and you will be saved."²⁷

VI. PRAYER AT WORK, WORK FOR PRAYER²⁸

While the whole movement of the nun's life as journey into God is her essential "work," our Constitutions (LCM 106, II) define work as "any activity, manual or intellectual, in which the nuns engage," but which is relegated in terms of allotment of time to a place after prayer, reading, choir practice and study. So much for priorities; what about the "unceasing prayer" of the monastic tradition?

"The whole purpose of the monk and indeed the perfection of his heart," says John Cassian, "amount to this: total and uninterrupted dedication to prayer...This is the reason for our tireless and unshaking practice of both physical work and contrition of heart."²⁹ In a census in my monastery, housework and gardening showed strongly as kinds of work at which one can pray easily. One sister puts it well:

automation, technology, tend to take the burden off the body and put it on the mind...whereas the prayerful quality of monastic work is exactly the opposite: leaving the mind free while the rhythmic motion of the body creates the atmosphere of tranquility necessary for thought and union with God.³⁰

In his Ninth Conference on Prayer (Chapter 3), we have in a nutshell the whole structure of Cassian's ascetical program, inherited from Evagrius. Let us note for now that he gives special attention to predispositions for prayer--physical as well as spiritual, external as well as internal. "In advance of prayer," he says, "we must strive to dispose ourselves as we would wish to be during prayer. The praying spirit is shaped by its own earlier condition."³¹ What he is talking about here, I think, is that "harmonious ordering of the whole of our lives for the continual remembrance of God" of which our Constitutions speak (cf. LCM 74, IV).

I have talked earlier in this paper about the objective meaning and value of human work. "God is immersed to the elbows in our materiality"³²--and we can find him in our very consubstantiality with the "stuff" of our everyday world. Brother Lawrence "found God everywhere, as much while he was repairing shoes as while he was praying with the community."³³ "When eating an orange, eat the orange" the Zen Master will say.³⁴ Do what you are doing and you will find God there.

What about work that engages the mind to a degree that prevents ruminating on the Scriptures, repeating phrases from the psalms or the antiphons of the Office? Fabio Giardini, O.P., in his book PRAYERFULNESS, A PSYCHOTHEOLOGICAL SEARCH INTO THE MEANING OF PRAYER, elucidates for us how the person of prayer remains united to God-within, even during the most demanding intellectual activity. He writes:

To be prayerfully aware of God's presence can not require any (actually impossible) unceasing conscious attention to the Lord throughout all daily occupations. It only demands that we become more and more pervaded with the subconscious awareness of God's presence in our

whole life...

[He goes on:]

...when the acts of prayer are over, our conscious attention to the Lord cannot but end also, because during our daily occupations the conscious attention of our mind ought to focus on our work. ...the knowledge and love of God which that conscious attention has cultivated, confirmed, and deepened should not stop but be carried over by the subconscious awareness of the same Lord, which can be kept through all daily occupations. Like two sentries taking successive turns...so the conscious attention to and the subconscious awareness of the Lord should uninterruptedly follow each other in the spirit of the prayerful person.³⁵

Giardini's careful text suggests an ambience of quietude, simplicity and harmony, or in other words, the predispositions for prayer that ought to prevail in the life of the Dominican nun.

VII. CONCLUSION

We are not untouched, undisturbed, by the culture we live in. Our forebears of past centuries would be unable to comprehend the pace of life in our monasteries today. To counter the inroads of activism in our lives, I think we must first reclaim the vision: "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 45:11). We must see ourselves as seekers after God. How terrible to put accomplishment, achievement, ahead of that knowing of God which is eternal life!

In the concrete, the monastery chapters have competence to discern and establish the right balance in the schedule, to prioritize correctly, and especially to provide the leisure time mandated by our Constitutions, #106. As the nuns mature in religious life, there should be suitable freedom to organize each one's personal schedule so as to reduce tension at work. While appropriate steps need to be taken when there is objective overload, is it too simplistic to suggest that personal discipline is often the first remedy called for by stress at work?

In particular, I would like to highlight two factors which I think will be important for the future: **Study** and **Formation**.

Study. As this paramount Dominican observance takes hold in the monasteries, activism will diminish. Here may I salute the Conference council and priest consultant for their timely and farsighted leadership in this area. Study exerts its own fascination: we now see nuns unashamed to spend afternoon hours reading in their cells. Workaholism and activism will recede in the measure that we make prior concerns real priorities in the daily schedule.

Formation: Adapted, rethought, revitalized, Cassian's teaching can be transplanted into our time and culture. Three elements from his teaching would seem to be of greatest importance: reciprocity, the working-together and mutual influence of all the monastic practices; self-discipline, beginning with personal asceticism; and balance, the new name for discernment or discretion. (There is

a tremendous need, I think, to establish the right balance in the schedule, to prioritize correctly.) Let me demonstrate, if I can, the interplay of these three elements in a work situation, as such interplay might be taught to novices:

Housework (which probably needs to be minimalized) and gardening are apt examples, as stated earlier, of work for prayer. The prayer formula of Cassian's Conference 10, or something similar, would be used: "O God, come to my assistance. O Lord, make haste to help me." But we cannot pray, at work or elsewhere, without some degree of stillness of soul. The desert ethos is insistent about the value of fasting for the quieting of the passions and progress in virtue. Perhaps the new word for fasting, since so many candidates have health problems, would be diet, or better, self-discipline in one's diet. A proper diet is necessary for bodily health and is at the same time an opportunity for serious self-discipline. The rhythm which enables prayer at work must be calm and unhurried, yet balance for the sake of other elements in the horarium requires that the time be limited. The loving union with God, learned in prayer-at-work, results in the reciprocal benefit of growing ease in the practice of the virtues. Faithfully, regularly, steadily practiced with gentle insistence, such work situations will come to be cherished by the novice. Attention to prayer at work, such a large element in the monastic fathers' teaching, as well as at prayer-time, will implant subconscious awareness of God, arming her for eventual incorporation into the community and the encounter with zerrissenheit.

This gathering this afternoon, Friday, September twenty-fifth, is perhaps unique among the thousands of important meetings taking place in this country today. It is a gathering of rare birds. We have come from East and West, North and South. If this meeting could be transposed back fifteen and a half centuries, what would it look like? We'd have arrived on foot, sunbaked and dusty, with deeply tanned skin and a fair bit of it showing (the habit at the beginning was a sleeveless linen shift...). Desert dwellers, the desert ascetics: the call we have answered is the same as theirs! The ethos of the desert has always been counter-cultural. We have managed, in late twentieth-century America, to preserve islands of withdrawal and solitude in the midst of some of this country's largest cities! A tiny minority in a vast population, a call rarely given.

Our response to the call that has been offered us lies, I suggest, in a return to the center, not in a conservatism which tends to preserve structures while stifling life, but in a conversion of heart which reaches to the very core of the monastic ethos. And so we have come to this momentous gathering on the brink of the twenty-first century, by car, by plane, by jumbo jet (we do not regret progress). We have come to reclaim, as we have said, a vision. The occasion may be important but we try to be humble. For we really are, I hope, simple and humble women, like our desert forebears. Standing alongside the poor (I hope) we work at humble labor, with hands, hearts, and minds. Sisters and daughters of Dominic, our lives have to be, ultimately, love. Love and reverence for all God's creation, which shares our travail. Love and reverence for one another and our brothers, the friars. Love and reverence for all races, all creeds, all colors; all of humankind, in other words, progressing as we are toward the Redemption. We are "monos": alone, with God, in whom all things exist, and therefore one with the entire cosmos.

Notes

1. M. D. Chenu, O.P., THE THEOLOGY OF WORK, tr. Lillian Solrow, (Chicago: Regnery Co., 1966) p. 3.
2. Hannah Arendt, THE HUMAN CONDITION, (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1958). I am indebted to Ms. Arendt for most of this section.
3. Frederick Copleston, A HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY, (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1965) 7: part 2, chs. 15 and 16.
4. THE DESERT CHRISTIAN: Sayings of the Desert Fathers, trans. M. Benedicta Ward, S.L.G., Macmillan Co., Inc., N.Y. 1975, p. 230, no.3.
5. Ibid., p. 91, no. 30.
6. Cf. SPIRITUALITIES OF THE HEART, ed. Annice Callahan, R.S.C.J., (New York: Paulist Press, 1990) esp. ch. 2: Irenaeus: At the Heart of Life, Glory, Mary Ann Donovan, S.C., pp. 11-22. See also ADULTHOOD, ed. Erik Erikson, (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978) Chapter: "Christian Adulthood", pp. 80-96. Numerous other sources could be cited.
7. Chenu, THEOLOGY OF WORK, p. 104.
8. Gaudium et Spes, THE DOCUMENTS OF VATICAN II, Abbot-Gallagher edition, (New York: Guild Press, 1966) #34. See also #67.
9. St. Athanasius, THE LIFE OF ANTONY, (New York: Paulist Press, 1980) p. 42.
10. Ibid., p. 69.
11. Pope John Paul II, LABOREM EXERCENS: ENCYCLICAL ON HUMAN WORK, (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1981) ch. 25, p. 57. (Hereinafter cited as L.E.)
12. Karl Barth, THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS, 6th ed., tr. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1933, 1960) p. 309.
13. SACRAMENTUM MUNDI, ed. Karl Rahner, S.J. et al., "Natural Law"(New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) 6: 157-164.
14. M. D. Chenu, "Work", SACRAMENTUM MUNDI, 6: 369.
15. L.E., ch. 26, p. 59.
16. cf. L.E., ch. 6, pp. 16-17.
17. cf. Erik Erikson, "Reflections on Dr. Borg's Life Cycle", ADULTHOOD, ed. Erik Erikson (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978) ch. 1.

18. L.E., ch. 6, p. 15.
19. Simone Petrement, SIMONE WEIL: A LIFE, tr. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976) p. 240.
20. L.E., ch. 8, p. 20.
21. Thomas Merton, THE SIGN OF JONAS (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co. 1953) p. 41.
22. G. Dahl, WORK, PLAY AND WORSHIP, quoted by Michael Ryan in SOLIDARITY (London, Ontario: Divine Word Publications, 1986).
23. Karl Rahner, THEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS (Baltimore, Md: Helicon Press, 1966) vol. 4, ch. 16, "Theological Remarks on the Problem of Leisure", p. 381.
24. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, GIFT FROM THE SEA (New York: Random House, 1978) p. 56.
25. For an analysis of acedia, cf. Joseph Pieper, LEISURE: THE BASIS OF CULTURE (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963) ch. 3, pp. 38 ff.
26. Cf. Pieper, op. cit.
27. THE DESERT CHRISTIAN, p. 44, #1.
28. This section presupposes that my audience is familiar with M. Marie Rosaria's excellent paper, "Manual Labor, A Monastic observance for Dominican Nuns", DOMINICAN MONASTIC SEARCH, vol. 10, (Fall/Winter 1991), pp. 51-62.
29. John Cassian, CONFERENCES, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, tr. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964) vol. 11, ch. 2, p. 387.
30. This paper reflects the thoughts of many of my sisters, both in my own and in other monasteries, for which I am most grateful.
31. Cassian, ch. 3.
32. SPIRITUALITIES OF THE HEART, p. 12.
33. Brother Lawrence, THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD (Philadelphia, Pa.: Whitaker House, 1982) p. 90.
34. Eileen P. O'Hea, C.S.J., "Detachment in Our Psychological Age", REVIEW FOR RELIGIOUS, (July/Aug 1992) p. 541.
35. Fabio Giardini, O.P., PRAYERFULNESS, A PSYCHOLOGICAL SEARCH INTO THE MEANING OF PRAYER, (Milan: Massino, 1984) p. 53. [Emphasis mine]. See also p. 67, paragraph 1.

PURSuing COMMUNION IN GOVERNMENT

ROLE OF COMMUNITY CHAPTER

Father Malachy O'Dwyer

Introduction

At first sight one might wonder what might be the relationship between Dominican Vision and Communion in Government. Surely, it will be said that the vision of the Dominican Family is to be found in the first section of the Book of Constitutions dealing with the life of the brothers or of the sisters -- in those parts dealing with religious consecration, prayer, study, ministry or work, formation -- rather than in the second section dealing specifically with government. At least it is not likely that one who sets out to capture the spirit, the charism, of the Dominican Order, will begin with the section on government.

And yet, in the Constitutions of the Friars, far more space is given to the section on Government as compared with the section on the life of the brethren. Of the 619 constitutions contained in LCO, 368 are found in the section on government while there are only 283 in the first section. Over 3/5 of LCO deals specifically with government. In fact, the percentage would be much greater if we extract from the first section all those constitutions dealing purely with legal requirements (eg. for novitiate, profession, ordination, study). The difference in proportion is not quite as noticeable in the Constitutions of the Nuns. Of a total of 283 constitutions, 113 (that is 2/5) are devoted explicitly to government while there are 170 in the first section. Here again one would have to take into account the purely legal or organizational norms of the first section.

But whatever the precise proportion might be, it must be admitted that we give a lot of space to matters dealing specifically with government, with how we organize ourselves.

Inspiration and Institution

I would argue that, unless we understand the laws, the norms, which govern our relationships within the family of Dominic and within each of its parts, it is very difficult to have a true understanding of the vision which Dominic had when he founded the Order. Dominic has not left us writings of any substance but he has bequeathed to us institutions which embody his spirit and his vision. Hence the importance for us to appreciate and to be a part of these living institutions.

Unfortunately, for some time we have been caught up in a tide of anti-legalism which has swept through the Church. It was felt that an excessive emphasis on legal norms had blurred the basic vision of the Christian vocation and there was obviously much truth in this. But for us the vision and the spirit of Dominic are so interwoven into the fabric of the norms, the organization, which rule our lives, that one cannot ignore the latter without running the risk of losing sight of the former.

These (Constitutions) rule us and not the ideas of any individual or individuals. We are Dominicans and our life is only possible as long as we obey our laws.

(Bede Jarrett, "Letter to George Bowring, 30 July 1929," Letters of Bede Jarrett (Downside Abbey and Blackfriars Publications, 1989), p. 148.)

If we are to recover or reclaim the Dominican vision for the 21st century we must look to the institutions which have been bequeathed to us. And it is only through living them in practice that we will regain that vision to which we all "subscribe thoughtlessly."

... but all subscribe thoughtlessly to many beliefs, the truth of which does not strike home to us until experience gives them reality. Wisdom may be rented, so to speak, on the experience of other people, but we buy it at an inordinate price before we make it our own forever.

(Robertson Davies, The Salterton Trilogy (Penguin, 1986), p. 428.)

If we base our appreciation of the Dominican vision on the first section of our constitutions, then it is rented, second-hand and incomplete. It is only when we live according to the second section of those same constitutions that we truly discover the reality of our vocation and make it our own.

Charism and Community

Marie-Humbert Vicaire is very explicit in affirming the connection between the charism of Dominic and the community which he founded. The thread of Dominic's inspiration is finely interwoven into the fabric of the life of the community.

The genius of the Father of the Friars Preachers was to have invented a community capable of inspiring, forming and making use of such preachers, planting

them on Christian soil as well as beyond it. No one in the West up till then succeeded in doing this. No evangelical preacher had succeeded in handing on his charism and his ministry by means of a community that was lasting and effective.

(Marie-Humbert Vicaire, O.P., The Genius of St. Dominic (Dominican Publications, Nagpur, India), pp. 77-78.)

Vicaire also points out the principal method which Dominic used to ensure both the continuation and the development of his vision and inspiration.

In 1220 a new factor came into play, one which was to bring to completion both the framework of the Order of Preachers and its inner strengths, and which would direct the course of its evolution. This new element was the community of brethren assembled in General Chapter, for in 1220 Dominic arranged for representatives from the dozen priories which he had founded to meet at Pentecost. He summoned them to Bologna, home of the most dynamic of all his communities and centre of learning for both church and civil law. He expressly stated that in this major Chapter was vested the legislative authority of the Order, and that while in session it would have supreme powers of control and government, even over his own person. This decision profoundly shaped the outlook of the Friars Preachers and their institute.

Did Dominic do this on his own initiative? He did indeed. It was he who decided to convoke the Chapter, and he made it abundantly clear that he regarded its authority as sovereign. Such authority could not be taken for granted. On Dominic's part it implied a gesture of humility and of trust in his brethren which moved them so deeply that we hear echoes of it even in our own day. Dominic had both a sense of community and a love of community, something which found expression in the wider application of the dictum borrowed from Roman law: 'Quod omnes tangit ab omnibus tractari debet' - What is of concern of all must be dealt with and agreed by all.

(*ibid.*, p. 41.)

Dominic's vision, his inspiration, is communicated to his brethren in such a way that it becomes the creation of all. He inspired others by sharing his vision and allowing it to take root and mature in them in such a manner that it seems to come as much from themselves as from him. He allows them to make it their own and give it a shape to their own liking.

The care with which he sought to draw from a person the best effort he was capable of brings us to another characteristic of St. Dominic: his desire for fraternal communion. . . . But once it concerned the collective activity, whether of legislation or discipline, he gave precedence to the fraternal communion. . . . His spontaneous confidence in the community of his brethren, his desire to give to each one the maximum of initiative and commitment where our common work is concerned, his obvious joy at seeing the system work was seen most radiantly in the last days of his life at the convent of Bologna.

(ibid., pp. 121-122.)

The mechanism by which this is achieved is very simple. He brings the brethren together and tells them that they must decide how they shall live and work together. This coming together, this sharing and deciding together, is what we call "Chapter."

Person and Project

The shape which Dominic gave to his Order seems very simple. But it is important to understand the implications, the unspoken and unwritten values which lie beneath the fabric of our way of life.

We can begin by asking, "Why did Dominic place so much trust and confidence in his companions?" The answer is a simple one. He was profoundly a man of God, convinced that the hand of God lay upon everything and everyone. His own vocation as a preacher was not one that came to him in a sudden illumination but rather one which emerged slowly from the circumstances of his life, and especially from being attentive to the needs of others. The lesson he learned from this was that he must be attentive to the voices of others, to listen to God speaking to him through the lives of others. If he was convinced that God was indeed speaking to him through voices other than his own then he had to organize his family in such a way that all within the family could be heard. He had to create a space in which all would feel free to contribute. I like to think that Dominic saw his relationship with his brethren as similar to that between the priest Eli and his disciple Samuel (cf. I Samuel 3). Dominic knew that those who came to join him were called by the Lord and that the Lord was speaking to them, that they had come to serve the Lord in his presence as Samuel had in the presence of Eli. Like Eli, he knew that if he were to discover what it was the Lord was saying to them, he would have to listen to them. And he also knew that it might be something over and above what he understood the Lord had said to him personally. There was no question of having a ready-made mold carefully prepared and

maintained into which his companions would have to fit and by which they would be formed. He was well aware that their vocation was not of his making but a free gift of God which he should accept humbly and cherish.

If they were called to join him in his project of preaching, they had first of all to be attentive to the voice of the one who had called them. And it was important that every member of the group should know what the Lord was saying to each. Only in this way could it be known what the Lord wished for the group as a whole. A system had to be devised which respected both the freedom of God to speak as he wished and the freedom of each to express their understanding of what God was saying to each personally.

Also I would say that we had a good long tradition of community meetings, with everybody, students, novices, everybody, trying to discuss quietly, patiently, trying to reach a consensus. We didn't always succeed. Looking back now, I see we failed but at the time I thought we did well. I think that it went with a strong belief, for me at least, that the role of superior was going to be like a gardener. You didn't come to bring your own vision; you didn't come to impose your ideas; your bit is to cultivate what is there. That, I think, is the best bit about being a superior -- to discover the richness in the brethren. The challenge is to believe in them more than they believe in themselves. You can only do that if they believe in you more than you do in yourself -- so it is like mutuality of belief.

(Timothy Radcliffe, Interview for IDI, after his election as Master of the Order -- reply is to the question, "What was it like to begin the service of authority as prior of Blackfriars? And afterwards, as provincial?")

Nature and Nurture

The system devised by Dominic must have seemed to some a sure recipe for anarchy and disintegration. But in fact the miracle is that the family of Dominic has never in its 700 years lost its unity. If not a blueprint for self-destruction, it must have seemed to many a dream, an ideal, for a utopic society in which everyone had an equal right to say what they wished and the assurance that they would be heard respectfully.

Let me read to you part of the conclusion of a book entitled Culture and Society, written by Raymond Williams, in which he proposes that the only way forward for modern society is through a system of mutual sharing and participation. When

I first read this book a number of years ago, I reflected then that this, for a Dominican, was no dream for the future but a living reality -- or, at least, that our system tried to make it a lived reality. But let Williams speak for himself.

A culture, while it is being lived, is always in part unknown, in part unrealized. The making of a community is always an exploration, for consciousness cannot precede creation, and there is no formula for unknown experience. A good community, a living culture, will, because of this, not only make room for but actively encourage all and any who can contribute to the advance in consciousness which is the common need. Wherever we have started from, we need to listen to others who started from a different position. We need to consider every attachment, every value, with our whole attention; for we do not know the future, we can never be certain of what may enrich it; we can only, now, listen to and consider whatever may be offered and take up what we can.

The practical liberty of thought and expression is less a natural right than a common necessity. The growth of understanding is so difficult that none of us can arrogate to himself, or to an institution or a class, the right to determine its channels of advance. To tolerate only this or that, according to some given formula, is to submit to the fantasy of having occupied the future and fenced it into fruitful or unfruitful ground.

We have to plan what can be planned, according to our common decision. But the emphasis of the idea of culture is right when it reminds us that a culture, essentially, is unplannable. We have to ensure the means of life, and the means of community. But what will then, by these means, be lived, we cannot know or say.

(Raymond Williams, Culture and Society (Pelican), p. 320.)

Raymond Williams is, of course, writing as a sociologist. He is not concerned, at least not directly, with the religious dimension of human experience. But if his analysis is correct from a natural point of view, then it is even more so when we take into account the factor of God's influence in human affairs, in the life of each. It is not possible to say beforehand, to predetermine, what God will say to this or that person, what he may be asking of them. All that can be done is to create an environment which will respect and facilitate vital forces which are not of our own making. Dominic knew this and he did create such an environment. He was careful to provide a space for individual freedom within the framework of

the relationships necessary to ensure the survival of the group.

We are often tempted to think and behave otherwise. It is all too easy to think that we have fully grasped what we like to call the "Dominican Ideal" and that we must hold on to it tightly and make sure that others understand it as we do. But that is to attempt to create something in our own image rather than respect the image which God is gently and slowly bringing to fruition in each of his creatures. This is the danger, that, through excessive zeal or perhaps through fear of losing something precious, we might distort if not destroy that which we claim to cherish. Here again we might listen attentively to the words of Raymond Williams.

It is as if, in fear or vision, we are now all determined to lay our hands on life and force it into our own image, and it is then no good to dispute on the merits of rival images. This is a real barrier in the mind, which at times it seems impossible to break down: a refusal to accept the creative capacities of life; a determination to limit and restrict the channels of growth; a habit of thinking, indeed, that the future has now to be determined by some ordinance in our own minds. We project our old images into the future, and take hold of ourselves and others to force energy towards that substantiation. We do this as conservatives, trying to prolong old forms; we do this as socialists, trying to prescribe the new man.

(ibid., p. 321.)

Because the system and structure of government in the Dominican Family are a cherished part of our heritage, combining a deep respect for the individual person with a corresponding vision of shared responsibility for the building up of community and the exercise of authority, we encourage our sisters to continue their efforts to implement their Constitutions which faithfully reflect this vision of an organic and ordered participation of all in striving to achieve the aims of the Order. (cf. LCM 1.V; 7; 181)

(Acts of General Chapter of Oakland, no. 157.)

Unity and Diversity

Herein lies the genius of Dominic. He was able to create a system which would both confirm and respect the gifts, the talents, the graces of each and also confirm and strengthen the community which is even larger than the individual gifts.

What is even more obvious from my having lived the life is Dominic's intent that the unique talents of each individual should not be stifled but rather enhanced and the potential brought to its fullest actualization. I view us as 'a unity in and through diversity.' We are very diverse people but the uniqueness is brought together in a life of charity in community.

(David M. Hynous, O.P., Canonical Visitation, 1984.)

It is a system which is able to support and encourage diversity without creating separation. But it is not a simple system. It is a complex organization requiring constant attention, reevaluation and adjustment. But this is a sign of true democracy, true freedom.

I wonder whether there is not also a connection between true democracy, true freedom, and the impermanence of the models we revere. . . . It is as though democracy can only thrive on the sharing -- and then perhaps on the shearing -- of illusion, and can flourish only on the ruins of permanence. . . . A genuinely democratic culture, however, like the carefully balanced life of an individual human being, is a fragile thing, the more valuable for the built-in impermanence of everything it embodies.

(Jacques Darras, Beyond the Tunnel of History (Macmillan, 1990), p. 15.)

The system of government, of living together, which Dominic has bequeathed to his family is a texture which is loosely woven, leaving big enough gaps through which our own life can send its threads and designs. And we must be careful to leave it so. Sometimes, in the name of a false unity, we tend to tighten and tidy up that flexibility which is part of our heritage.

The tendency of the mind is economical, it loves to form habits and move in grooves which save it the trouble of thinking anew at each of its steps. Ideals once formed make the mind lazy. It becomes afraid to risk its acquisitions in fresh endeavours. It tries to enjoy complete security by shutting up its belongings behind fortifications of habits. But this is really shutting oneself up from the fullest enjoyment of one's own possessions. It is miserliness. The living ideals must not lose their touch with the growing and changing life. Their real freedom is not within the boundaries of security, but in the high-road of adventure, full of the risk of

new experiences.

(Rabindranath Tagore, Nationalism (Macmillan India Limited), p. 31.)

The Dominican way of living together requires much patience and perseverance, and the involvement of all in a common seeking and sharing. It is a way of life which seeks to elicit the best from each but which is simultaneously gentle with the shortcomings of each. And perhaps the latter is more important than the former.

It is the imperfections, the roughage, the accommodation of inconsistency and of the eccentric, of the grand and the petty, the precise and the asymmetrical that is the touchstone of the mature political culture that we have developed.

(Darras, Beyond the Tunnel of History, p. 14.)

Amos Oz makes the same point in his book, The Slopes of Lebanon.

One could fill volumes with descriptions of the querulous Zionist family and its trends and nuances, the panoply of love-hate relationships, the competitiveness, the use of covert influence, and the overt rivalry between its various components. Thus a rich texture of contrasts, complex and compelling, not only characterizes contemporary Israel, but was inherent in its very foundation. It may, of course, atrophy because of a superficial desire to 'lower the fences' for the sake of unification around some trite common denominator. Or it may yet serve as a creative field of tension between various systems of values, as a sharp stimulus for cultural creativity through an intellectual and emotional struggle between differing visions. This will come if all of us accept pluralism not as a transient illness that must be eliminated, but as a blessing, and that we remember there are moments of truth when even a divided society must make a clear-cut decision on values and priorities.

(Amos Oz, The Slopes of Lebanon (Vintage, London, 1991), p. 73.)

We, too, accept pluralism as a blessing which enriches our common heritage. For us it is not divisive because the framework which Dominic gave to his family provided explicitly for such diversity. He did not wish the richness which comes from God to be suffocated by our human smallness. There is no human model, no human framework, which can adequately accommodate the presence of God. Hence the need to be forever reevaluating and pondering upon the way we live our lives.

This might seem precarious and adventurous. So be it. It has served the Order well over the centuries.

We are pilgrims with no fixed abode and for us "the making of a community is always an exploration" . . . "a community of those who seek the truth . . . "

The real community of man, in the midst of all the self-contradictory simulacra of community, is the community of those who seek the truth, of the potential knowers, that is, in principle, of all men to the extent they desire to know. But in fact this includes only a few, the true friends, as Plato was to Aristotle at the very moment they were disagreeing about the nature of good. Their common concern for the good linked them; their disagreement about it proved they needed one another to understand it.

(Allan Bloom, The Closing of the American Mind (Simon and Shuster, New York, 1987), p. 381.)

Freedom and Responsibility

As Dominicans we have never sought a contrived consensus as a way to building community. Nor have we ever considered those who differ from us as a threat. We have always allowed space for others to be themselves and the freedom to communicate their uniqueness. For it is in the lonely mind of each that lies the preciousness which is to be shared and which, if not shared, is both an impoverishment of the whole community and a diminishment of the individual to whom the sharing is denied. It is a precious part of our heritage to have always respected that fundamental liberty which characterizes the human person and which gives him his dignity. Freedom is our birthright. To deny it to others is to deny them their vocation. Nor should we be tempted in times of stress or crisis to sacrifice or curtail this freedom for the sake of expediency or efficiency.

But let me read to you part of a pamphlet written many years ago by Vincent McNabb.

Whereupon I entered a long alleyway of thought concerning the Friar Preachers' birthright of freedom. So wide is this reign of freedom that no other Order in the Church may be compared with it; and withal so subtle that it reaches to the fine divisions between soul and spirit. Indeed, at first sight, and perhaps at second and third sight, the organization of the Order is so interwoven with principles of freedom that it seems to hold every element of destruction. Scarcely is there to be found any mathematical or mechanical force of cohesion; everywhere the elements of the Order seem

loosely articulate with that most unaccountable factor, the human freewill; and that most unruly exercise of the human freewill, the free and secret ballot. By ten thousand psychological laws, the Order founded by Dominic Guzman, the friend and the Father of Parliaments, ought to be dead or at least divided. But it is alive and one.

Later on he warns of the temptation to tamper with our birthright.

No amount of freedom foiled or spoiled should wean us from loyalty to our unique profession. From time to time there arise in the Order, as a kind of reaction to their environment, a number of over-zealous and not over-wise people, who repent of the Order's birthright of freedom, and look upon it as individuality run mad. Not unfrequently there is only too much to lend colour to their phrases and schemes. But abuses in administration are not cured by abuses in reconstruction. The Order will not begin to live, but will begin to die by such schemes as the appointments of all superiors, or the re-arrangement of our executive on lines of central administration.

(Vincent McNabb, O.P., The Gyves of Freedom (Blackfriars, Hawkseyard), p. 6-8.)

Today, perhaps, we need to be on our guard against a more subtle and insidious attack on freedom, one which is all the more dangerous and destructive because very often it is hidden and practiced unwittingly. Those who are called to join the Family of Dominic depend on those who are already members for much of their formation. They are in a position of dependency and can be easily manipulated. But such manipulation, if practiced, is altogether foreign to the spirit of Dominic.

No oppression is more powerful and more destructive than that which dominates the religious and moral conscience of the human person. There is no greater manipulation than the manipulation of conscience, because through it one can obtain and legitimize all other manipulations of the human person. And there is no greater service to a person than to educate him/her to freedom. Fear of licentiousness frequently destroys faith in freedom and eliminates education for freedom. The fear of freedom can be rooted in the good will of those who feel responsible for others, and it can be legitimized by an appeal to realism. But this makes it no less a lack of faith in the vigour and force of the Christian experience. Fear and the lack of faith always go hand in hand.

(Felicísimo Martínez Díez, O.P., Camino de Liberación y de Vida (Declé Brower, Bilbao, 1989), p. 23-24.)

... the task of forming consciences demands a superhuman responsibility, and the attempt to manipulate them is a sin without par.

(ibid., p. 15.)

Dominic had a profound respect for his early companions and profound respect, too, for the work of the Spirit in their lives. In his dealings with them there is no taint of manipulation, no attempt to bend them to his will.

Vision Rather Than Coercion

If Dominic did not seek to impose his will on his brethren, and this is reflected in the way he organized them so that their way of life emerged from a consensus rather than being ruled by dictate, this means that he greatly respected the contribution of each to the common cause. In his family everyone becomes a builder, must share in the task of construction, and is encouraged to offer his/her own personal contribution. This, of course, implies a view of morality different from "one where a detailed map is provided"; it is rather "one where a destination and a compass will prove more helpful and more realistic for individuals, ..." The quotation is from John Mahoney's The Making of Moral Theology. But let me quote further.

Once one systematically allows, then, for error in good faith and even more for a variety of moral perceptions of reality by individuals, the road-map view of morality is seen as being of only limited value. An alternative view which exists in the moral tradition -- particularly of Aquinas -- but which the moral teaching of the Church or of subsequent theologians has found less congenial, approaches morality from within the subject rather than presenting it to him from outside. It is a view of the moral development of the individual which is more organic than mechanical, and more cumulative than successive in its approach, exploiting now the theme and the language of self-realization. Rather than view the moral agent like an arrow in flight and on course towards the center of the target, it considers him more in terms of an acorn growing into an oak tree, and, what is more, of this acorn growing into a particular oak tree. For this way of viewing the moral life proceeds by a capitalizing of personal resources, or in more Aristotelian terms, by the

fulfilment of one's human potentialities towards happiness, or Aquinas's beatitude.

(John Mahoney, S.J., The Making of Moral Theology, A Study of the Roman Catholic Tradition (Clarendon Press), p. 220.)

We have inherited the mechanism, the framework, by which the project of Dominic can be lived and realized today. Perhaps what we need is to recover the vision which gave life to that project at the beginning. Or perhaps what we need is the conviction that the practical realization of such a vision is possible.

I suggest that the only way of reclaiming the Dominican vision for our times, and recovering, too, the conviction that the living of that vision is possible, is by living according to the system of government which has been bequeathed to us.

"Prayer, Study, and the Life of Withdrawal"

William Columban Barron, O.P.

I have been asked in this paper to address the topic of study and the Dominican life of withdrawal. To do this well it is first necessary to answer the question, what is the world from which the nun withdraws? The necessity of answering this question is obvious because it touches upon the nun's vocation to participate in her Lord's mission to save the world. What is there about the world that needs salvation, specifically a salvation which will benefit it by the nun's withdrawal?

Confronted with the task of defining the world, I feel much like the cosmologist who began her lecture by saying, "The topic of today's talk is everything." Nevertheless, let me begin by stating that "world" has many possible definitions. I have decided to provide here the critical understanding of "world" theorized by the western Marxists of the Frankfurt School. I do this because they do not share with us a Christian perspective. Their definition of world cannot be said of itself to further Christian interests. In addition to this, Herbert Marcuse, one of the Frankfurt theorists to whom I will refer momentarily, offers a compelling, and, I believe, an accurate, picture of an unjust human situation in which world is essentially a deception parading as reality. Since it is from this world that people take their self-understanding, and further, since it is under its categories that they must live out their lives, the unmasking of the deception is paramount. However, there can be no unmasking and no commencement of authentic human existence because, by this theory I am employing, the mechanisms which construct the world as real always succeed in re-incorporating any oppositional

elements seeking to reveal and concretely overthrow its eviscerating deceptions.

However, it is not just the world that is deceptive. The individual as personally defined within the world's semantics is also illusory. Leo Lowenthal's analysis of the incorporation of the individual into a cultural personality through the format of literary biography will serve as one example -- there are many -- of how the individual cannot escape the world any more than human society can escape it.

If no one can escape the world, how then does the nun do it? And in doing it, how does she in turn unmask the world's debilitating falsehoods? When we answer these questions, we will then be able to locate the practice of individual study in the communal life and salvific witness of the Dominican nun.

In Matthew 5:38, Jesus commands the disciples to offer no resistance to the evildoer. Few other admonitions of the Lord so clearly indicate his desire that both the Christian individual and the Christian community be practical countersigns to human society in the world. This precept, so enigmamatic at first hearing, opposes the fundamental mechanism whereby the world alters those who contravene its ruling trends. Since the advent of market capitalism, whose product is the modern world, the rupture in social relations which it entails has been the constant concern of the dominant social groupings which both

determine and benefit from control of the means and relations of production. Society's cultural formations function at the service of the dominant political and economic class which needs to produce images of itself for consumption by those who are antagonized by its power, values, and interests. Culture supplies the illusion of a real world which veils the gap between the self-interests of the dominant class and those whose real social relations are dissembled by it. Within culture a realm of apparent unity and freedom is created where the beneficiary class establishes the hegemony of its own values and in which the oppositional relations of the real world of social and economic relations appear to be stabilized and pacified (Marcuse, p.96). In this way, the culture of advanced capitalism always affirms and conceals the permanent inequalities and injustices of concrete social life (Marcuse, P.96).

With respect to the individual, contemporary culture enshrouds this entity with its own notions of personality, and establishes it as the bearer of culture. This personality is a beautiful image which, because it is specifically the ideational similitude of the individual, is well suited for consoling and confirming the isolated concrete man or woman (Marcuse, p.122).

Although the historical moment is veiled by the culture of the dominant class, nonetheless, individual experience on the level of concrete life belies its ideal happiness: "...The universality of this happiness is immediately canceled, since the abstract equity of men realizes itself in capitalist production as concrete inequality" (Marcuse, p.97). The cultural

obfuscation of social experience wears thin and the gap between illusion and experience begins to become transparent. Once this gap appears, the need arises to re-veil it by the mechanisms of culture. In our own country, beginning earlier in this century, one of the ways of accomplishing this has been by the literature of fact, of which the biography is a primary example.

Like the novel and short story, the biography aestheticizes the cultural personality but in a way that brings the realm of culture close to the everyday experience of political, economic, and social relations thereby closing the gap once again. The literature of fact reaches directly into the material sphere to lay hold of living exemplars of the hegemonic culture. Early in the century, when the gap was once more showing itself, biographers introduced the "idols of production" into literature emphasizing not their unique traits but their real individual powers, standardizing them according to the current national scene (Lowenthal, p.113). These biographic heroes (industrialists, politicians, professionals, businessmen, religious leaders) could be pointed to in extra-literary life as active members of society engaged in the determining events of history. The illusory deceptiveness of their literary lives was achieved by an emphasis on the individuality of their talent and drive. However, their seeming "individuality" was nothing other than a personality constructed by the culture which held out to the reader the promise of happiness in an aestheticized formula for success. These heroes were mere symbols, not real people. The reader, educated by the biography format, was encouraged to

imitate these ideological symbols of the dominant class by thinking that these heroes were not different than himself/herself. If the older literary forms of the novel and short story delivered happiness through escape, these biographies of the idols of production presented it as attainable through imitation.

At sometime in the 1920's, the biographies of the idols of production became biographies of the idols of consumption. The new heroes were almost exclusively popular entertainers and sports figures (Lowenthal, p.114-15). The social relations of this next generation of heroes are represented as totally privatized. They are static beings to whom things happen -- things that make them successful -- without their having to act to realize them. They have had the "breaks" that others have not had and so cannot be said to be responsible for their own success. The heroes of sports and entertainment are segmented individuals and their historicity is represented only by a series of facts not actions. Lacking integration into the processes of history, their only activity is a passivity: they consume.

This next generation of biographers selected these individuals out of real experience based specifically upon the criterion of consumption: what they eat, what they wear, what they smoke, what they drive, etc. (Lowenthal, p. 118). These biographies aestheticize the ideological personality as having already achieved happiness in commodity consumption. Moreover, although their lives are configured as symbols of the consumers who read about them, in real life they are themselves semantic

products of the entertainment and sports industries. The heroes of the older biographies could be pointed to in concrete life as efficient causes of the very economic and cultural hegemonies they exemplified. Entertainers and ballplayers are exemplars of industrial products. In the world of concrete experience they simply signify how far into the personality the commodification process has extended itself.

These symbolic personalities -- symbols even in the concrete world of experience -- are already agglomerations of various commodity relations. When made the subjects of popular biographies, the pure character of the commodity culture which they represent is brought before the reader as image of himself/herself. In consuming that illusion, the reader dissipates as an individual and recovers his/her personality only through identification with the market forces which have already determined him or her. The new personality is an instance of the standardized mass, and that which was (would have been) antagonistic is absorbed into the illusion of consumptive normalcy.

The imaged world which an unjustified society produces through the values and needs of its leading class effectively resists those evildoers who would otherwise seek to restructure the social relations under which they labor. By the historical illusions of world and personality, the dominant class mystifies itself and anesthetizes those other social classes, and the individuals who compose them, against radical changes in the concrete human condition. Even violent revolution, whether

arising from marginalized social groups, or inspired by the consciousness raising of an historical vanguard, has proven quite recently to be incapable of justifying the seemingly irredeemable facts and trajectory of human social life. The world created by Marxist parties simply employs different cultural mechanisms to veil the gap between a dominant class and those alienated by its particular interests. The personality of the individual was no less a standardized instance of the ideological mass in the Communist world than it is in the capitalist.

Conditioned as we are by the cultural programatics of the American scene to view the "free" world as radically different from the Communist -- or from all others, for that matter -- we tend to recoil at the suggestion that essentially all "worlds" are the same. Simply defined, the world is always society's image of itself. As I have indicated, the unjustified, unregenerate nature of all human societies necessitates that the world which societies produce and concretize by historical action will always be illusory. Jesus banishes illusion by the revelation of a new approach. Jesus did not resist the evildoer. Instead, he loved those who abused him and those whom the world abuses. By this single fact, he offered the perfect counterpoise to the intrinsic false consciousness of the world. He brought the Father's rain to fall on the just and the unjust; upon those who foster human alienation and upon those whose alienation is left unreconciled by cultural concealment. Seen from the world of Christ, all people are equally malefactors and their worlds equally unjust. But he came not to condemn them but

to save them, not to resist them but to invite them in love. He did this because human society is caught up in something that is very much like a vicious circle.

Society is constituted by the concrete actions of its individual members. But society also produces the world as image of itself and continually constitutes itself historically by that self-image. The world includes the individual as person. What we are and the way in which we interrelate and act --all this is already contained in what the world as image conditions us to be. We, as constituents of society, make ourselves to be what we are. This is our historical definition, our actual concrete nature. We keep producing worlds out of the worlds we have produced yet our worlds are illusions, untruths about ourselves and injustices which we cannot remedy. No world is adequate to the vocation of society, namely, human happiness. We need a new world in which to be new persons, happy in a just society. However, we can escape neither the world we make nor our responsibility for its radical disorder. But "if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation. The old order has passed away; now all is new! All this has been done by God who has reconciled us to himself through Christ... I mean that God, in Christ, was reconciling the world to himself, not counting men's transgressions against them... God made Christ who did not know sin, to be sin, so that in him we might become the very holiness of God" (2Cor. 5:17-21).

Jesus is the image of the Father, the Logos through whom the world was made as human image of God. It is likewise through

Jesus, the only true image of God, that we as individuals are claimed as persons out of our illusive world, the historical world of our making, and reconstituted as persons in the person of God, Jesus Christ ("Father, they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world...consecrate them by means of truth..." Jn 17:14,17). In Jesus, the perichoretic society of God enters the world; and through those reborn in his person, a new world finally appears. It is this true image shared by the followers of Christ that actively stands against the image human society has made of itself. The world hates this new image of redeemed humanity because love is alien to its scheme ("The reason the world hates you is that you do not belong to the world. But I have chosen you out of the world." Jn 15:19). The world tries to bring Christ's image under its illusions but cannot. This demonstrates to those who share Jesus' image that they are protected by his prayer ("For these I pray --not for the world but for these you have given me for they are really yours." Jn 17:9); and that they love with his love, a disposition not of this world's making ("If you belonged to the world it would love you as its own." Jn 15:19). For his followers, Christ's refusal to resist the evildoer entails a suffering love ("They will harry you as they harried me." Jn 15:20. "You will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve for a time..." Jn 16:20). Jesus' new world of redeeming love, however, will not be defeated by this world's opposition ("You will suffer in the world. But take courage! I have overcome the world." Jn 16:33).

Note, however, the world's opposition is both active and passive. In taking what was created as the human image of God and rendering it into an exclusively human image, human society is only capable of recognizing itself in its various historical worlds and can no longer recognize its true image which comes through Christ ("He was in the world, and through him the world was made, yet the world did not know who he was." Jn 1:10). Those who are reconstituted in the world as its redemptive counterpoise, the image of the new humanity, are (and should be) unrecognizable to the world: they are in the world as Jesus was ("As you have sent me into the world so I have sent them into the world." Jn 17:18). The world will recognize only what is its own. Thus the community of those freed by Christ from slavery to the world's illusive self-image will be recognized only through belief, that is, when the world comes to believe that Jesus has been sent by the Father. The world is brought to this belief by observing the unity of the community of those regenerated in Christ ("I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me." Jn 17:21). This unity is the image of what is generated in Christ's followers by the perichoresis of God ("As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Live on in my love. You will live in my love if you keep my commandments... My command is this: love one another as I have loved you." Jn 15:9, 12).

Because it loves in all instances and for no worldly reason, the community of Jesus cannot be construed as oppositional by the world's programatics. Moreover, the love-for-one-another which

constitutes the new humanity forestalls the dissembling illusions of the world. By so doing, it models for humanity that unity of the Trinity which is the world's only hope for ending the vicious cycle of its own concrete untruth (Kasper, p. 284).

Finally, because in God substance and relation are really identical, as Walter Kasper reminds us, unity and independence are greater than in the created world: God is absolutely undivided unity and so must also be infinite differentiation (Kasper, p.283). The personal freedom of those who are regenerated in Christ is absolute --a freedom which the world cannot give. In Kasper's words, "The unity with God that is established by Jesus Christ neither absorbs nor dissolves the human person (as do the economic and socio-cultural mechanisms which incorporate the individual as an element of the world); it means, rather, an abiding distinction and thus is the basis for authentic independence and freedom. In Christianity the mysticism of unity between God and man and between man and Christ is a mysticism of encounter, friendship and communion with God; it is realized in and through human encounter, friendship and communion, and in turn radiates outward into human friendship and communion and attains its full stature in these" (Kasper, pp. 284-85). Christ's command that we love one another as he has loved us makes the unity of God manifest at the same time that it recreates the individual person in freedom making him or her independent of the image of the world and its conditioning.

The Dominican nun withdraws from the world by a special call of God in order to live freely the life of Christ in a community of free women whose unity and mutual love calls the world to its vocation to believe in the one whom the Father has sent. It is a redemptive vocation -- for the individual, the community, and the world. The nuns realize this vocation by hearing Christ's voice in its purity in silence, by celebrating his word in the liturgy, by meeting him in sacred scripture, and by receiving him in his body and blood. They become one living sign of the saving Word himself, preserving in their very persons the image that shares and saves, begins and consummates human history ("Called by God, like Mary, to sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his words, they are converted to the Lord, withdrawing from the empty preoccupations and illusions of the world." LCM 1. III.). Or, in the words of Dostoyevsky, "They are in truth made ready in peace and quiet 'for the day and the hour, the month and the year'. Meanwhile, in their solitude, they keep the image of Christ fair and undefiled, in the purity of God's truth, from the times of the Fathers of old, the Apostles and the martyrs. And when the time comes they will show it to the tottering creeds of the world" (The Brothers Karamazov).

"The nuns of the Order of Preachers came into being when our holy Father Dominic gathered women converts to the Catholic faith in the monastery of Blessed Mary of Prouille" (LCM 1. I.). These women he withdrew from the world so that he always had a clear

and concrete example for his hearers of that which he preached. Moreover, knowing that faith seeks understanding, but that understanding relies upon the meanings generated by the world, Dominic recognized how easily the understanding of the faith could be penetrated and confused by the world. He made it the mission of the Friars Preachers to reclaim for the mind the possibility of understanding what it believes without confusion or admixture of error. This vocation necessitates being where the meanings, alienations, and illusions of the world are: in the world of human making. The friar was to experience and live, to a certain extent, the world's meanings, alienations, and illusions. To preach the Truth, one must take upon oneself the image of the world as the Truth himself did when he came among us. This is a dangerous, perilous vocation because the world claims as its own all who walk its labyrinths. However, as Jesus never left the society of the Trinitarian unity and love, the friar never is without the real, concrete model of that perichoretic love in the monasteries of his sisters, the nuns. The active witness of that love-for-one-another which marks the nuns' vocation strengthens and safeguards the vocational mission of Dominic and his brothers by its stability and freedom from the world's illusions. In fact, I believe that the preaching work of the Order could not have begun, at least as Dominic envisioned it, until the nuns had been established in their withdrawal, and the image of Jesus Christ had been brought forth into the world by the nuns' ardent longing for the fulness of the Holy Spirit (LCM 1. IV.).

The nuns locate themselves by a divine call in a place where the world's meanings are silenced in order to hear the word of God so that it will not return to him empty but may accomplish those things for which it was sent (LCM 1. II.). Their "hidden life" (LCM 1. V.) is a silent one by necessity then. "The nuns listen to the word, celebrate it and keep it in their hearts, and in this way proclaim the gospel of God by the example of their lives" (LCM 96. I.). It is not enough to be physically separated from the world so as to proclaim Christ and be transformed into his image; the nun also cultivates silence. The world cultivates and propagates its meanings through language -- we carry the world even in our minds. Silence in the enclosure, silence within the nun, suppresses the world's words and permits the Word of God to be conceived.

"The Blessed Dominic 'rarely spoke except with God in prayer, or about God...'. " Perhaps it would be drawing the line of distinction too sharply between the nuns and friars of the Order to say that the nuns are Dominic speaking with God in prayer, and the friars are Dominic speaking about God. I say too sharply because the nuns share as well in the ministry of the word. The nuns' constitutions, however, in addressing this shared ministry of the word link it to their vocation of prayer: "The brethren of the Order, 'commissioned entirely for spreading abroad the word of God,' fulfill their vocation primarily by preaching. The nuns, while commissioned by God primarily for prayer, are not for that reason excluded from the ministry of the word" (LCM 96. I.).

Prayer is the true image of God in the world because Christ prayed on the cross. Prayer is the root of the Dominican nun's life, then, for it is the cause of the new humanity born from the side of Christ. Prayer-as-life is the most eloquent counterpoise to the world, that self-generated image of humanity's disordered society and history. "In fulfilling (all of the constitutional prescriptions for prayer) they are truly nuns of the Order of Preachers" (LCM 74. IV.). The prayer of Christ on the cross is his revelation of the Father to us at the moment of his own return. That prayer is the historical donation of Trinitarian life -- Divine Society -- because in emptying himself, Jesus gave over the Spirit of Life. The liturgy of the Eucharist is the presence and activity of this perichoretic love. It is the only prayer, and the living image of the community of God. "Hence the solemn celebration of the liturgy is the heart of our whole life and the chief and the chief source of its unity" (LCM 75.). The eucharistic prayer leads the nun to private prayer (LCM 89.) and to an increase of the Theological virtues (LCM, 90.), the keystone of Christian maturity.

Prayer is the image of Christ alive and reigning because through his prayer Jesus unites in love those who believe in him ("And I -- once I am lifted up from the earth -- will draw all men to myself." Jn 12:32). Prayer-as-life is made possible by withdrawal and silence. But what fosters it is lectio divina. The nuns' constitutions state, "Lectio divina is ordained to a real dialogue with God, for 'we speak to God when we pray, we hear him when we read the divine sayings'," (St. Ambrose quoted

in LCM 97. I). We see here why lectio divina is essential to the image of the new humanity: Jesus' return to the Father on the cross was the Word speaking -- at which moment the mystery of the Father's fulness was heard forever in human history, a recreative silence over which their Spirit breathed. In silence, pondering the divine sayings, the nun hears this Word nourishing her vocation to prayer-as-life. "The nuns should ponder the scriptures deeply, so that like our blessed Father Dominic, the nuns may pass easily from reading to prayer, from prayer to meditation, and from meditation to contemplation" (LCM 98. I.), the fulness and end of prayer.

I have argued that the nuns' vocation is to demonstrate the unity in love that brings the world to believe in the one whom the Father has sent. Withdrawal from the world is the precondition of this ministry of salvation. The friars' constitutions also speak of unity: "We are reminded by the Rule that the primary reason why we are gathered together is that we may dwell together in unity..." (LCO 2. I.). This is a communion "in mind and heart" that extends to all the friars of the Order, i.e., it is not specific to a particular convent, although it does not exclude this. Thus the friars live a unity-in-the-world that signifies that which they preach: "Rooted in the love of God, the unanimity of our life should provide an example of the universal reconciliation in Christ, which by word we preach" (LCO

2. II.).

Reconciliation is union with God through conversion of heart and the forgiveness of sins. Only the Word, the true image of God and humankind, can do this. The words of the friars call all people to this unity in the Word. Secured by the example of their lives, they incarnate the Word himself in the world where people acquire identity and knowledge through words. Thus the friars' unity is in mind as well as heart because meaning, generated through social relations and supported and reproduced by culture, is personalized in the mind. We are conscious of ourselves as elements of the world, that is, as persons, by the various human "words" we have in mind. To the minds of people from the minds of the friars, the word of reconciliation leading to unity enters the world of human words. This mission is supported by the witness of their unanimity of life.

Silence in the constitutions of the friars serves the ministry of Word and words: "Silence shall be diligently observed by the brethren, especially in places and at times reserved for prayer and study..." (LCO 46. I.). In prayer, the image of God, Jesus Christ the Word, affects mind and heart; in study, the image of human society enters mind and heart. United in mind and heart by Dominican fraternity, the friar turns the word of God to the words of humankind in order to turn people to God the Word who brings all things into unity. The vocational and ministerial equality of prayer and study is distinctive to the Dominican friar. With respect to the purpose of religious silence, the constitutions do not prioritize them.

In the whole outline of the friars' constitutions, however, there is a ranking. First, the liturgies of the Eucharist and the hours are dealt with. Next, other forms of prayer are enjoined. Lectio divina (LCO 66. I.) is not given a separate heading as it is in the nuns' constitutions where there is an entire article devoted to it (LCM 97-99.). For the friars, lectio divina is encouraged as one of several fruitful means to contemplate, converse with, and foster friendship with God. Following prayer, there is an extensive section devoted to study. Significantly this section precedes the one which deals with the mission of the friars, namely, preaching.

"St. Dominic included study, ordained to the ministry of salvation, as an essential part of his plan for the Order -- this was no small innovation" (LCO 76.). "Before all else, our study is aimed principally and ardently at this: that we might be able to be useful to the souls of our neighbors" (LCO 77.). Compare this with the constitutions of the nuns: "The methodical study of sacred truth, according to the capacity of the individual, is a fruitful preparation for lectio divina and an aid to human maturity" (LCM 100.). AS with the friar, so with the nun: study is to serve the apostolate, the ministry of salvation. For the friar this directs him into the world to his neighbor; for the nun, this directs her to the scriptures where she ponders the divine address so as to pass easily from reading to prayer, from prayer to meditation, and from meditation to contemplation. Study aids her human maturation into the image of Christ, a free person in the Person of the Son made capable of living-in-love in

a community of women regenerated and united in Christ.

The friar too lives a religious unity with his brothers but its power is translated into human words, bringing the divine word to a reception and comprehension in the world, which, as I have argued, is a culture of human meanings. The constitutions therefore mandate that not only scripture and the sacred sciences be studied, but also the Fathers, who are witnesses of Christian thought, and St. Thomas, our brother and model (LCO 79, 81-82.). But the friars are told to study as well the living tradition of the church, to open dialogue with contemporary scholars, and to know the most recent science and discoveries (LCO 81.). The human maturation of the friar, who calls the world to a true human solidarity by the proclamation of the Word in human words, is a maturity in the cultural context which he embraces not by resisting evil but by loving. The nun demonstrates to culture a world created and nurtured on the Word, the true image of God and humankind. The friar acquires the culture of the world, taking its meanings upon himself there to transform them into the image of God through a collaboration with his brothers. Dominican nun and friar share a single apostolate of the Word, and each calls people away from the illusions of the world and its meanings to freedom and truth in Christ. The nuns, however, withdraw from the world to live that true unity in love which the friars enter the world to proclaim as the vocation of all people. The place and nature of study in this shared mission are determined by those respective ends.

In a real sense, Dominic intended the nuns to benefit from

the friars' acquaintance with the world through study and the proclamation of the Word. I have already suggested that he joined both the friars and nuns together in a unique ministry of the Word in which the nuns become a living sign of truth and a safeguard for the friars as they become immersed in the meanings of the world. Because their engagement with the world is solely for its salvation, the friars are especially enabled to bring to their sisters the refinement of methods and ideas which have been successful in making the Word heard and believed in the cultures of human society. This can only aid in lectio divina leading to contemplation of God.

The fruit of the friar's contemplation which study has aided shows itself in the preaching of the Truth. The fruit of the nun's contemplation shows itself in the unity-in-love which leads the world to believe in Jesus, the one whom the Father has sent. Study for the friar is turned to the world as it is; study for the nun is returned to the life which she lives in that unity which is love, withdrawn from the world with her sisters. Study for the Dominican nun is turned to that world which awaits all who are reborn in Christ -- a world they make real for all to see and hope.

Down through the Christian centuries, the gospel has been both lived and proclaimed. Since sacred scripture is the embodiment of the Word in human words, lectio divina is central to the nun's vocation. It is important, therefore, to study those who have studied the human and divine relations evident in scripture since the alternations of cultures through time affect

the reception of sacred scripture and thus, to a certain degree, lectio divina. The Fathers are the best and earliest witnesses of what later was to appear as the unique Dominican vocation of studious preparation in the meanings of the human world in order to proclaim the Word. Thus the Fathers are studied by both the nuns and the friars -- by the friars because of the various methods employed in differing human contexts to make a hearing for the Word, and by the nuns because of the Fathers' manifold insights about the Word himself. The theology of St. Thomas is at root an explication of the scriptures and Catholic tradition so purely wrought that for all practical purposes it is perennial. For the friar he is a model of how to engage the meanings of the human world in the service of the gospel; for the nuns, he is an unsurpassed guide for understanding the height and depth of sacred scripture, and thus for lectio divina leading to contemplation of God.

As Dominicans, nuns and friars share a common and collaborative ministry of the Word for the salvation of humankind. Both engage the illusions of the human world in the exercise of that ministry. However, they engage the world in different ways. The nuns withdraw from it in order to image the society of the Trinity, absent the determining influences of human culture. The friars bring themselves to ministerial maturity within human culture in order to understand and

transform its world of meanings into the image of God. Study figures into both evangelical missions but only as determined by the needs of their respective approaches. Thus the nun studies to return her to the contemplation of the Word so as to image the unity and love of God in the world. The friar studies so as to turn the world to the Word of God, its true image and only happiness.

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DOMINICAN MONASTIC TRADITION

A PARABLE OF THE WORD

(A modest response within the context of Fr. Bill Barron's profound presentation: PRAYER; STUDY; WITHDRAWAL as Interior Attitude and Disciplined Focus. McLean Assembly, September, 1992.)

The kingdom of heaven is like this. There was a child born into this world, and, in the making, the Lord engraved words upon her heart. One of these graven words was: "We have here no lasting city". In due time as she viewed the world about her, another graven word came forth: "God saw all that he had made and, indeed it was very good". There were however, storms and dangers about this good world, but the Lord, her God, said to her: "Peace. I myself, Faithful and True, will shelter you with my presence." And so it happened.

The Lord, her God, led her to live in a quiet flowering desert to speak to her heart, to teach her to love him with her whole being, to be his betrothed. And she lived there with her Lord, at one with her brothers and sisters, in a holy dwelling that looked like an eight-pointed star engulfed in a blazing ball of fire, and its name rested above it: MY GOD MY MERCY. Some who dwelt there remained to tend the fire, and others were sent forth into the world with the Book of the Gospel and a flaming torch.

She remained within the holy dwelling and entered the cell of self-knowledge, but she was slow to learn and is so to this day, though closer to burial than to birth. Gradually another graven word came forth: "You are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked". Day by day she sat with this word and pondered it in the dark bright light of God's love. The awareness of her lowliness and poverty increased, and she bore within her heart a flame and within the flame, a tear as heavy as lead. She washed the feet of her Lord with this tear, but it remained, heavy as lead. Suddenly the Lord transported her to a hill and invited her to live there. And she lived there, at one with her brothers and sisters, in a holy dwelling that looked like an eight-pointed star engulfed in a blazing ball of fire, and its name rested above it: MY GOD MY MERCY. Some who dwelt there remained to tend the fire, and others were sent forth into the world with the Book of the Gospel and a flaming torch.

From this hill the Lord showed her a city teeming with wretchedness: poverty, ignorance, drugs, prostitution, violence, pain and oppression...hopelessness. Her heart nearly burst with sorrow for she knew well by now what it is to bear such fearful darkness. So each day she stands by an open window calling to all who pass by: "Deeply do we share with you your weakness, your woundedness. Come brothers and sisters, images of God, share his strength and healing with us!" Then a graven word is heard: "THIS IS MY BODY".

* * * * *

"On the wall of my cell is a wood-burned crucifix that I received on the day of my profession. The engraving is fading away with time....

May the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit
 engrave it in me
 so that I may become
 'inexpressible groanings' (Rm.8:27)
 for my human brothers and sisters."¹

¹The words of one of the Nuns of the Dominican Monastery, Berthierville, Canada, in their videotape Au Coeur du Monde.

DOMINICAN VISION FOR THE FUTURE: A REFLECTION

Sr. Jean Marie, O.P.
North Guilford

Dominic, as he formed his followers into a new Order, shared his vision also with the group of women who had been gathered together at Prouille. Our monastic vocation is rooted in our Dominican charism which gives it its unique character and spirit. Where do we find those elements that define our charism? The basic spirit of the Order is found in the "Fundamental Constitution of the Order." In the "Fundamental Constitution of the Nuns" and LCM we have that charism made specific to the Nuns.

FUNDAMENTAL CONSTITUTION OF THE ORDER

The first three sections state the very essence of the Dominican charism: a following of Christ through sharing in the universal mission of the Church, dedication to evangelization, an intense relationship to the Word of God, Gospel living, and the explicit seeking of salvation for all men and women. The communion of members and our universal mission are essential to our Dominican identity and flow from the ecclesial character of our charism and its goal, the salvation of all. The remaining sections of the document complete the picture of Dominican life by outlining the various elements that define it.

Section IV speaks of living the common life, the evangelical counsels, common celebration of the Liturgy, study and regular observance, which not only give glory to God but "but serve directly the salvation of mankind.." Our governmental structure is also essential to the character of Dominican life. These elements indeed dedicate us to the Word of God and prepare for the preaching to which we are committed. These essential structures of our life directly contribute to our mission and goal.

Then the Constitution states a fundamental principle of Dominican living: "These elements are closely interconnected and carefully balanced, mutually enriching one another, so that in their synthesis the proper life of the Order is established" (IV). It is in this synthesis of elements, carefully balanced, closely interconnected and mutually enriching that we have the great wisdom of Dominic's charism.

Sections VI and VII speak of the Order's structure which arises from its mission and the communion of the members. Our mission to preach the Word to all nations gives the Order a universal character. From our mission flows our obedience and the need for personal responsibility and the use of the gifts of the members. Section VI speaks of this responsibility and

affirmation of personal gifts in relationship to the preaching, but I believe these characteristics belong to Dominican life wherever it is lived and form part of its nature. Dominican life, with its great respect for the goodness of human nature, calls for initiative and responsibility from the individual as we seek to realize in our common life the full purpose of our calling. Section VII speaks of Dominican government as also flowing from our communion and universality. Our governmental structure is one of "organic and balanced participation" of all the members "for pursuing the special end of the Order." Our Fundamental Constitution in Section V echoes this by saying: "The nuns seek God by...pursuing communion through their manner of government."

RENEWAL, REVISION AND CONVERSION

The last paragraph of Section VII and Section VIII speak of the important place of renewal within the Order. Our government is "particularly suited for the Order's development and frequent renewal" (VII). Renewal is necessary for the sake of Christian conversion, preaching, and an intimate relationship to the Word of God as it is manifest in each generation and epoch of history. The power of revision and the ability to enact laws which allow the Order to remain faithful to its mission is a distinct characteristic of Dominican government. Every element of the Dominican structure points towards and enables us to fulfill the goal given us by Dominic. As dispensation in our tradition is for the sake of fulfilling our common vocation, so too, this power of revision is for the sake of living our life with greater fidelity to the Gospel.

ESSENTIAL DOMINICAN CHARACTERISTICS AND THE NUNS

The Nuns too embrace all the elements of Dominican life as a following of Christ and a way of living the Gospel. We share in Dominic's vision and in the Order's fundamental spirit and mission. Those particular and essential characteristics that mold our Dominican existence are total dedication to the Word of God, an ecclesial and apostolic vocation, indeed an intimate sharing in the salvific mission of Christ. Our vocation as nuns of the Order forms the specific way in which we appropriate all the essential characteristics of the Dominican charism. As Dominicans we have been given totally to the proclamation of the Word of God through prayer, penance and the witness of our lives and are dedicated in a new way to the universal church, sharing fully in the evangelical and salvific vocation of the Order.¹ In section II of the Fundamental Constitution our way of life is identified with the friars and is characterized as a life of perfection "which is effective in caring for and obtaining the salvation of all people." In the chapter on lectio and study our legislation again makes clear our special relationship to the preaching and the Word of God and the salvific mission of Christ.

Finally we add the elements of conversion and renewal,

personal responsibility, mutual trust and the use of personal gifts for the good of all and the fulfillment of our mission. Monastic life is characterized by stability, yet we too need a system of renewal that is faithful to the Order's tradition and enables us to introduce those changes necessary for remaining faithful to our charism as it exists in each new age. Renewal and conversion presuppose those wonderful characteristics that Dominic possessed and imparted to all his followers: courage, hope and trust in one another. Renewal and conversion are fundamental to Dominic's vision and therefore an essential part of our own identity as Dominicans. I think this involves not only an ability to discern outward stimuli and incorporate those elements in the present culture that are enduring, but also that inner dynamism which calls us to exercise good government and empower the gifts that our sisters possess. In regard to renewal and governmental responsibility, one area we need to look at is calling new and younger members into roles of leadership. The council should be representative of the whole community, from all the varied sectors of community, young and old. Just as it is not good to reelect superiors over and over, so I think we also need to have a variety of people serving as council members.

CURRENT ISSUES AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

What are some of the current issues that have effected changes in our way of life and continue to shape us toward the future? The impetus comes both from without and from within our monastic life. From without the most obvious are the changes implemented by Vatican II, the rapidly changing condition of society, international communication and also the changing position of women in the world. All these have profoundly affected religious living. From within we have the changes in our Constitutions, the need for vocations and the need to understand and communicate with the women who will be entering, smaller and aging communities, and the closing of houses. These circumstances have sparked a growing concern for the quality of Dominican monastic life throughout the world.

The changing position of women in society has had a definite effect on our monastic life, especially in the light of new governmental responsibilities. When Dominic founded our first communities self-government was not a possibility for women. Now this has changed radically. The movement toward more autonomy for women's communities in governing themselves and the more equal status of women in society as a whole will bring about a greater delegation of responsibilities to our monasteries. This movement has already affected Canon Law which in turn affects all legislation for communities of women. We now live in a society where women are expected to undertake the responsible direction of their lives.

The changes in LCM, especially with regard to government, have been an important reality shaping our future. The governmental legislation of LCM extends not only to good

government within our monasteries but also calls for universal legislative structures. The growing awareness of the universal dimension of our life is closely related to this change in LCM.

The greater possibility for self-government given to the nuns by their Constitutions makes many changes necessary for future growth and in order to live out LCM fully. We have the legislative power to become more responsible for our life but without the necessary structure to make such responsibility an effective reality. Thus we have seen the establishment of a commission of nuns and an outreach toward one another in order to improve communication and foster mutual awareness and understanding of our vocation internationally. This movement toward mutual help and unity has been fostered nationally through federations and conferences.

GOVERNMENTAL STRUCTURES

The 1971 revision of our Constitutions was our first radical revision of legislation since that done by Humbert.² This revision for the first time gave us a more direct and responsible role in promulgating our own legislation.

The 1971 Constitutions restored some very basic Dominican elements and in particular the unique character of Dominican government with its balance of governmental elements. The few changes in the 1981 Constitutions reinforced this. In these two revisions, that of 1971 and 1981, we have reclaimed our close interconnectedness to the Order's legislative spirit, no longer solely through our relationship to the brothers but directly, as our own legislation calls us to take up the task of self-government, locally and internationally, following our wonderful Dominican tradition.

This power is something we are still beginning to take up and develop. Clear, precise and objective legislation is a hallmark of the Dominican tradition and now we, the nuns, need to develop a greater ability to enact such legislation without over-dependence on outside help. For this, education and study are important so that we may take responsibility for ourselves maturely and competently. Our new governmental structures and their use will lead us to take a greater responsibility for the direction of our lives, become more proficient in enacting our own legislation and capable of establishing a system of accountability in which we will serve directly, i.e., a system of visitations and accountability that involves the nuns themselves and not only the friars. I know there have been abuses in the past that have instilled distrust and caution, but there have also been many mistakes made under the present system. These stem not only from misdirection by outside sources but also from our dependency and inability to be responsible for the direction of our lives.

We are dealing with three levels of governmental structure:

1) the Directories which give the particular spirit and character of the individual monastery chapter; 2) LCM, an international level of legislation which entails more responsibility for us in changing our Constitutions when necessary; and 3) our juridical bond to the Order and the responsibility and accountability that involves. It seems to me we must be clear about each of these levels. Today we need to look at our governmental structure as it affects our common identity as Dominicans united constitutionally, our responsibilities within the local monastery chapter and our accountability to the Order. These three levels are supporting entities of Dominican government, mutually enriching and traditional to the government of the Order. The governmental legislation given in LCM follows the general contours of that type of government which has been part of the Order from the very beginning. It is indeed Dominic's unique and wonderful heritage to us.

There are two particular aspects of Dominican government that I feel we need to look at because of present developments. They are accountability and representation.

ACCOUNTABILITY AND REPRESENTATION

First let us look at the concept of accountability. A system of accountability has been a part of Dominican government since its inception. The different components of our government (chapter, superior and council) provide a set of checks and balances on every level of Dominican government, both locally and internationally. I believe we need to look at this aspect of accountability more closely and also move toward those structures which will provide a system of accountability for Dominican monastic life on a broader level.

The idea of accountability includes not only responsibility within the dimensions of our life and governmental structures as nuns but also our accountability to the Order. This is expressed through our profession of obedience to the Master of the Order. The Fundamental Constitution of the Order (VI) states that obedience to the Master is a principle of unity within the Order. There is a very real sense in which, as part of the Order, we can and need to be called to accountability for our faithfulness to the Dominican charism. This is and can continue to be one of the avenues of checks and balances for which Dominican government is noted and our link to the Order in this way offsets an unhealthy isolationism. But at the same time it is also necessary to take a more active and enlightened role in this universal dimension of our life. The new commission of nuns is beginning this important task. The two facets that seem important to retain and develop are our continued link to the Order with its accountability and a new enlightened and responsible participation by the nuns themselves in this area of decision-making. As we move forward into a future where we will be more directly responsible for our life I think it necessary to remain closely united to the Order and to our direct relationship to it.

Secondly we have the issue of representation. On the national and international level the question of representation is very important. The structure of monastic communities, as a grouping of autonomous monasteries which in the past have had very little communication with one another, takes on a new character in the light of our present Constitutions. A system of representation has always been an essential part of Dominican government. For us to work with our present legislation on a national and international level a system of representation is necessary. Thus we can see again the importance of the international commission and precisely this movement toward representation. There is no other way for us to deal effectively as a group given the governmental legislation of LCM. Good communication among us is thus so important at this epoch of our existence. To truly foster our vocation and role in the Order it seems we must develop our sense of common identity as an international entity rooted in a common Dominican monastic tradition. This common focus on our purpose and goal seems especially important in the light of the many urgent needs facing our monasteries throughout the world--lack of vocations, dwindling numbers, foundations, lack of personnel--and in order to foster healthy Dominican monastic presence throughout the world. The purpose of all of this is to strengthen our unity within the total reality of our Dominican cloistered life.

SUMMARY: DOMINICAN VISION

A vision for the future would contain all the basic elements outlined in this paper. It is a future commitment that we have already begun, are presently caught up in, and continue to move toward. This is a time for special reflection on our present experience so that we may move surely and with enlightened foresight into the future.

The text of LCM 181 has done much to start this process which is shaping us anew and calling us to new maturity and a greater unity and cohesiveness as a group: a future which unites us as an international group, with the need to work together and grow together in order to strengthen our common Dominican heritage. To realize such a vision communication on a national and international level is necessary. This task we are facing is one that calls for education, dialogue, communication. It will not be accomplished overnight but I firmly believe we are undertaking these new responsibilities in the power of the Spirit of God and therefore will grasp more deeply that to which we have been called in Christ Jesus. Jesus says all will know we are his disciples when we have attained the same unity that he and the Father share (Jn 17:23). So to move toward possessing a greater unity among all Dominican nuns is surely to preach the Lord Jesus with greater alacrity and to grasp our Dominican vocation more deeply.

NOTES

1. LCM, 2.II, 3.II, 74.IV, 75.

2. There were three revisions of our legislation before that of 1971: Humbert of Romans, 1259; A.V. Jandel, 1868 and Martin Gillet, 1931. All three were in response to changes in church legislation and ordinances of General Chapters. The purpose of Humbert's revision was to bring a greater legislative unity to the various customs and regulations practiced in the different houses. Jandel's revision remained essentially that of Humbert. His revision was in response to legislation from Trent. What was peculiar to Jandel's edition was the commentary by Ambroise Potton, O.P., which was printed along with the constitutional texts. The Commentary though not legislatively binding took on the aura of law for the nuns which eventually caused confusion and misunderstanding. When Gillet revised the constitution in 1931, the elimination of Potton's commentary from the Book of the Constitutions caused problems in getting some of the monasteries to accept the new legislation. Again the Gillet revision remained essentially that of Humbert with those changes necessary to update it according to the New Code of his time.

WORK AND THE INROADS OF ACTIVISM

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INTRODUCTION

Entering the 21st century of Christian existence, and approaching the 8th centenary of Dominican Life, it is appropriate to consider the place of work in our lives, and particularly the inroads that activism threatens to make. We see the timeliness of these considerations in the very themes of the 1988 and 1992 General Assemblies: **FREE FOR GOD ALONE** and **RECLAIMING THE DOMINICAN VISION FOR THE 21ST CENTURY**.

FRAMING THE QUESTION

Questions about work, and its place in the life of the nun have many interesting precedents in the developing history of cenobitic life. Among the first ones that come to mind, there is the cook in the Pachomian community, who used his "spare" kitchen time to make rush mats. To our way of thinking, this was a praiseworthy effort to help support the community. So we are quite surprised to find that Pachomius collected the five hundred mats and burned them, after rebuking the brother for neglecting his duty to the community. (1)

What about St. Teresa of Avila catching herself dashing off to check on this or that need, and then having to make herself sit back down to finish her prayer? Or the procuratrix, at San Jose, worrying that the community's meager supply of cooking oil will burn and be lost if Teresa has an ecstasy while cooking? (2)

Is Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection a possible example for us to emulate? He seems to have been remarkable even in his own community for being able to maintain a proper perspective on work in his life. (3)

Clearly, this is an age-old problem, if we can use such a term. Even in America almost two hundred years ago, Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton had to warn her first Sisters to be careful that they did not let themselves get caught in the "rat race." She reminds them about working:

Do it in the manner God wills it, not sewing an old thing as if it were new, or a new thing as if it were old; not fretting because the oven is too hot, or in a fuss because it is too cold. You understand -- not flying and driving because you are hurried, not creeping like a snail because no one pushes you. (4)

When we think of our modern western society in these last years of the 20th century, the image and images that come to mind are so busy, so action-packed and achievement-oriented, it is little wonder that the contemplative life is considered to be counter-cultural.

How many people find themselves trying to do two, three, or even four things at once, let alone "moonlighting" on several jobs? There are isometric exercises that you can do while you listen to a tape while you are riding the bus to work. There are instant breakfast drinks to be swallowed in a gulp as you dash to the gym to get in a quick workout before the special education session on how to effectively manage your time, so that you can get in more leisure activities and quality family time in the extra hour of light that you get from daylight savings time. There are incentive rewards for being more productive at work, so that they can encourage you to retire early, and hire a lower salaried worker to take your place in the job force.

In our wonderful, action oriented, "instant" society that is so geared up for production, why are so many people constantly searching for peace and fulfillment? Indeed, why did any one of us come to this life of contemplation?

Are we so very different when we look closely at the reality of our own lives? How many times do we find ourselves, as individuals and as communities, trying to squeeze our schedule just a little more closely together to get more time for work? How often do we have to juggle community recreation and leisure time, and even the times for prayer and study, against the "demands" of work? What about begrudging time spent in community meetings and/or practicing for the liturgy, as depriving us of "work time"? Isn't all this "robbing Peter to pay Paul?"

SCRIPTURAL THEMES/INSIGHTS

I think that we can find a way to overcome the tendency to activism in a very familiar line -- Psalm 46:10 -- **Be still and know that I am God.** The text has two parts for us to analyze at this time.

Be still. The very first word "be," is the verb "to be, to exist." And then we have an adverb telling us how to exist, "in quietness." But this is not a stillness that is dead, it is more the stillness of the gentle lapping waves at the lake shore; or the quiet, gentle stillness of a sleeping baby; or again, the contented stillness of sitting and rocking on the front porch in the quiet of the evening.

Know that I Am God. Here too, there are several thoughts all interrelated. First of all, "know" is to be read and heard in the deep Semitic sense of experiencing. It is something so much richer than the mere intellectual knowing we are accustomed to using; this is the deep experience of knowing that is conveyed in the phrase "and he knew his wife." Incredible as it seems, this is how we are to **KNOW GOD!**

Next there is the Being we are to know -- **GOD.** We see an added emphasis, a repetition, in the words, "I Am God," when we remember that "I Am" is the proper name for God, the name that Moses learned in the encounter with the burning bush (Exodus 3:14). It is somewhat like Catherine of Siena hearing God say: "You are she who is not, and I Am He Who IS."

We hear God saying to us: "I Am God. I, not you, am The Creator. I am not a phantasm of your imagination, doing things as you think they are to be done. Do you think that I am like you? I am God, not man."

In the 1st letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds us that we are to work in the world, but not be immersed in the world that we are working in. As he says, we have not adopted the spirit of the world. (5)

This is the example that Jesus the Carpenter's Son, and all of the Holy Family, set before us. Pope Paul VI used this theme in his teaching:

In Nazareth, the home of a craftsman's son, we learn about work and the discipline it entails. I would especially like to recognize its value -- demanding yet redeeming -- and to give it proper respect. I would remind everyone that work has its own dignity. On the other hand it is not an end in itself. Its value and free character, however, derive not only from its place in the economic system, as they say, but rather from the purpose it serves. (6)

PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS

Yet, there are also very real practical questions that we must face in evaluating the place of work in our lives. If we do not maintain the balance that our lives require, we run the risk of being either all work, or no work. So, we must consider the rhythm of our lives from several aspects.

First, there is the question of how much "productive labor" or "remunerative work" is necessary from a financial point of view. This question will thus include considerations of our style of living, and even how we pursue studies, and our household work, caring for the sick, etc.

Second, there is the primacy that the liturgical rhythm of the Church year gives to times and seasons in our routine life. How do we fit our work into the daily schedule of the Liturgy of the Hours? How do we plan our work to allow for the special holy times like Advent and Christmas; Lent, Holy Week and Easter; the annual retreat; etc.? (7)

Next, how do we regard our individual "charges" vis a vis the community projects and the common good?

A final question concerns our very future as Dominican Nuns. We will have to give serious consideration to the ramifications of our understanding of work in order to be able to pass this life on to the Sisters in formation. Do we want them to see our life as a "life of the workaholic nuns"?

SUMMATION

I wonder if these thoughts about **WORK AND THE INROADS OF ACTIVISM** in our lives, can be summarized within the framework of the original temptation in the Garden of Eden. The subtle lie of the devil was that they would not die if they did eat the forbidden fruit. And, the primary temptation for Adam and Eve was that they would be like God, knowing good from evil.

How much different is this from our situation today? There is the subtle lie that we will not die in the process of gaining our goal. And are we not tempted to be like God? Only in this case, it is to be like God who is pure Act, rather than to remain the creature of God, both potency and act.

CONCLUSION

St. Dominic and the first nuns gave work a definite place in the horarium. And LCM does not neglect this valuable form of asceticism. Yes, work is essential, but it is always a part of, in fact only one of, the **means** that we use to reach our **end -- union with God and the salvation of souls.** (8) This is the perspective that must always be remembered as we live our lives.

Maintaining the true values of our life will enable us to keep this essential perspective on the very priorities that drew us to Dominican contemplative life. These ends supply us with guiding principles for balancing the traditional customs and practices of religious life with the modern needs of living in the 21st century.

St. Dominic had the wisdom to do this in the 13th century. May we have a share in that wisdom in our own days.

- (1) Pachomian Koinonia, Volume II, Pachomian Chronicles and Rules, Translated with introduction by Armand Veilleux, (Cistercian Publications, Inc., Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1981), pp. 36-38.
- (2) The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila, Translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, (ICS Publications, Washington DC.)
- (3) See Henri Nouwen's thoughts in his forward to: The Practice of the Presence of God by Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, newly translated, with an Introduction by John J. Delaney, forward by Henri J. M. Nouwen, (Image books, a division of Doubleday and Company, Inc., Garden City, NY, 1977), pp. 9-12
- (4) Liturgy of the Hours, Volume 1, (Catholic Book Publishing Company, New York, 1975), p. 1690.
- (5) cf. 1 Corinthians 7:30, 31; 2:12.
- (6) Liturgy of the Hours, Volume 1, (Catholic Book Publishing Company, New York, 1975), p. 428.
- (7) In farming communities, the school year used to be, and sometimes still is, structured around the planting and harvesting seasons.
- (8) LCM 35. II.

THE WORKAHOLIC SYNDROME AND ORIGINAL SIN

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Summit

PRELUDE

The monastic contemplative life is the calm and serenity of unceasing activity, carried on as a means to a higher life of the spirit. Hildegard of Bingen described this higher life in musical language: "Like billowing clouds, like the incessant gurgle of the brook, the longing of the soul can never be stilled. It is this longing with which holy persons seek their work from God." (1)

In all walks of life, we meet dedicated people who respond to the demands of their vocation by working hard. They have been trained to a selfless commitment through fervent service after the example of Christ who washed his disciples' feet. The authenticity of a self-transcending life is made visible in deeply caring service and through different types of work. LCM 105:I points out that work, in our state of life, provides us with experience, and by its demands and difficulties, challenges us to transcend its successes and reverses. Work also reveals human potential, stimulates the life-force within each person, and perfects her unique giftedness.

For centuries, men and women have adjusted themselves to the changing attitudes and conditions in the world of work. They are involved in a rapidly changing process of transformation of the whole concept of work, service and freedom. The empirical sciences have expanded the field of vision concerning the changing nature of work and the development of human skills in modern technology. This article focuses on contemporary work as an experience, graced and human, in an industrialized culture. St. Thomas makes a distinction between opus, or the work of humans as co-creators and artists, and onus, which is work as a burden and a curse.(2) This Thomistic distinction is highly relevant to modern society and technology and to our present topic which is a countercultural critique of the pragmatic, omnipotent American work ethic. Omnipotent! How easily work can become an alternative to the transcendent God! With how many subtleties, inflections and chromaticisms does human work project the illusions and falsity of the world, ("world" in the Johannine sense) when it is not redeemed and transfigured in Christ! Together, let us look into this issue with a view to integrating current knowledge and traditional values, while opening up new paths to future inquiry.

THE WORKAHOLIC'S KEY SIGNATURE: "I AM WHAT I DO"

There are people whose desire to work long and hard is an ingrained habit and whose goals and work patterns almost always exceed the demands of the job they do and the expectations of the people with whom, through whom, and for whom they work. Not all hard working people, however, are workaholics. The time and energy spent at work and the weight of work are not a reliable index to workaholism. Long working hours are not the sine qua non of the workaholic syndrome. It is the attitude towards work, the hefty and compulsive appetite for work, which are the key to the whole issue of work addictologia. When a person uses work to prevent herself from being in touch with her inner life - bodily, psychologically, and spiritually - and when she needs more work in progression, we say she is addicted to work.(3)

The workaholic has difficulty in accepting herself for who she is. Self-worth is rooted in what she does. Job, projects and titles of office are the primary external means to her self-identity. Try to ask the "un-selfed" person who she is and she would tell you what she is doing, or better still, she will give you a list of her accomplishments. The workaholic's low self-esteem stems from the fear that there might be nobody within her worth knowing and loving. The workaholic has abandoned her inner core. In some cases, there is a complex interplay between human motivations and compulsive needs on the one hand, and religious experience and spiritual motivations on the other.(4)

A compulsive drivenness dominates the daily life of the work addict. Compulsion goes beyond the area of work and chemical addiction. Some back-up addictions to the workaholic syndrome are relationships, collecting things, and reading books without gentleness and moderation. Work addiction also goes hand in hand with functional relationships. The workaholic cannot say "No" to unreasonable demands for fear of disapproval. She seeks love and affirmation through being useful, rushing and caring. Work is her self-definition and emotional stance towards people. Non-activity such as rest and meditation must justify themselves as necessary means for greater productivity.

The first and final defense of the addictive process is denial. Other people support the denial by praising the workaholic as good, generous, self-effacing and heroic. To be super-good and super-efficient are contingent to being lovable. That is why workaholism is more difficult to grapple with than alcoholism because it can become a chronic affliction masquerading as a virtue in the cultural lore and ethic of religious people.(5)

FUGUE: TYPES OF WORKAHOLICS

The GENERIC WORKAHOLIC fits the stereotype to a T. In order to achieve perfect control, she orchestrates her work schedule into a predictable time frame. Time management is the key to success. Compulsion and perfectionism go hand in hand to create a pressure cooker atmosphere when and where she works. Try to visualize the tremendous outpour of energy when the generic workaholic is being chased by deadlines, real or imaginary. She seems to move faster than the rest of the world. The metronomic tempo is presto agitato. A sense of emptiness keeps her working all the time. She works beyond work and feels useless when there is not much to do.(6)

The generic workaholic is a one-dimensional personality. Leisure goes against her grain. At recreation, she is either busy at something or thinking and talking about work and more work. In matters of relationships, it is easier for her to sustain intimacy with work than with people. Her interactions with others are oriented towards functions and projects. When working with others, she de-motivates people by denying them the opportunity to practice initiative. Time, space and creativity are controlled by the generic workaholic. She is critical of others' works and she fears to relinquish her job.

The INTEGRATED WORKAHOLIC is a well-rounded personality type who enjoys work as well as other interests. She can be astonishingly happy and productive, finding work enjoyable and richly rewarding. The joy and stress of overwork inebriates her. A tight schedule that calls for split-second timing would hardly scare an integrated worker out of her wits. By working on the right things at the right time, she diversifies her day and adds a spice of adventure to every task. She knows how to psyche herself up by making the most of her time with the least stress. She also has the talent to simplify the methods of doing a job. People look up to her as capable and trustworthy.

An example of this type is the closet worker.(7) Like the closet eater who eats moderately at mealtimes and snacks on the sly, the closet worker accomplishes a slew of hidden projects. In fact, she has a huge supply of work inside her "mental closet." When you work with an integrated workaholic, the tempo is molto allegro e con brio. Her social contacts are invariably work-oriented. Ongoing projects serve to maintain relationships. Try to ask an integrated worker how she gets along with people and she will tell you how well she works with and through others. This type of worker, however, has great potential for true friendships that deepen and ripen with time.

A third type is the INTENSE WORKAHOLIC who loses her perspective and acquires a tunnel vision while absorbed in work. She focuses only on one thing: the job or list of jobs to be done. Rigidity, rather than spontaneity, characterizes the intense worker's approach to both work and play. She pursues leisure and recreation with the same intensity and gumption as she pursues work. Games are another form of work. A hobby is to be done with the same intensity and preoccupation as one pursues work and study. She works hard to have fun and her self-conscious efforts are carefully planned and structured.

We can take a look at the binge worker as an example.(8) Like the binge drinker, the binge worker will be moderate for a period of time. Then, suddenly, she will plunge into a breakneck schedule of activities. During this phase, she forgets herself and becomes absorbed by the work. The only difference between the binge worker and the binge drinker is that the substance of addiction is work, not alcohol. Work serves as a tension release valve to numb the feelings, quiet down questions, anxiety, doubts and unresolved emotional hurts. Binging is a psychological stance and common behavioral pattern for an intense workaholic. When she is in a binging mood, her pace accelerates into a molto allegro e con fuoco. This behavior, however, should not be confused with having to put on extra time and effort to finish a necessary task.

The intense workaholic is not well suited for teamwork or group projects because she is more likely to compete than to collaborate with others. Personal objectives and individual style come before the common goal. Her unswerving standard of excellence pushes her to think of and work out every detail of the job. Like the generic workaholic, she controls and de-motivates those who work with or under her.

The DIFFUSE WORKAHOLIC generates energy by "putting her fingers in lots of pies." Work, for her, is not just a job. It is also a source of child-like enjoyment. Ah! How many hours she spends busying herself with unnecessary tasks! With an allegro vivace tempo, she starts projects and pursues interests in many fields and drops them easily. Her short span of attention keeps her switching gears from time to time. She is not able to decide what is really necessary at a given time. Prioritizing is an alien thing to the diffuse worker. Oftentimes, her behavior is absurd or simply humorous.

A grasping stance towards things is an effect of this syndrome. The diffuse worker obsessively collects and hoards things. In fact, she gets out of sync when she loses or misplaces an item in her collection. She thrives well in a

cluttered room and will not clear it for fear she would have to face her inner self. A clutter takes her out of herself and frees her from an encounter with who she really is. This compulsive collecting of things can be transferred to ideas, relationships and power-generating jobs.

The WORK ANOREXIC (9) suffers from a poor self-image. Immobility and the compulsive avoidance of steady, conscientious work is her defense mechanism against fear of failure. The fear of making mistakes, of being ridiculed, criticized or rejected inevitably leads to procrastination. There is no finishing line for the anorexic workaholic, because she underestimates how long a project will take and then rushes to complete it. She dismisses hours and days into eternity with a nonchalant attitude. This behavior calls for a cool, aloof panache to conceal anxiety and uncertainty. Time hangs heavily on the hands of the anorexic worker. Her constant pace is adagio. What does she do when caught with the end of the year's log-jam of "must do"? Well, she either enters the new year without getting anything done or she manages to rustle up a few things. When the peak moment comes for an imperative act, she can turn into a rushaholic. Like the driver who gets caught in the final rush hour, the anorexic steps on the accelerator, gathers momentum, and, with a quick screech, roars through the open gate just a few seconds before it closes. A habitual anorexic pattern eclipses her sense of true self-worth. A person who either focuses on self by avoiding or turning away from self through compulsive overwork has a poor self-image, and this is the essence of pride. Workaholics can move through all five types easily. There is no strict categorization of types.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL ASPECT OF WORKAHOLISM

The workaholic syndrome is the confluence of childhood upbringing, job and career experience in the world and early religious formation. The research and study of psychologists confirm the fact that workaholism is an extrapolation of childhood development brought about by doting, ambitious parents and exacting mentors.(10) Most children feel that they should meet the lofty goals set before them by their elders. Would it not be terrifying to fall short of family and school standards? This attitude can be carried over to the religious life and perpetuated by a novice mistress who expects much from herself as formator by setting up a very high standard of excellence in training candidates. Then follows the ever-increasing demands and expectations of the community. The more a person accomplishes and produces, the more she is appreciated, until she begins to see love and acceptance as contingent on peak performance of jobs. Through utility and productivity, the person's sense of value and love-worthiness becomes contingent on the affirmation of others.

Recognition and acceptance are earned by being useful, competent, rushing and caring.

In some religious communities, the workaholic syndrome has become a considerable cachet. The religious stamp of workaholism is the most dignified and respectable version of addiction because it is productive. Many people began the addictive process as children. They have had 30, 40 or even 60 years of developmental conditioning in this behavioral pattern. The good person is someone who works non-stop without counting the cost. Prayer oftentimes suffers. The liturgy and private prayer receive the dregs of leftover energy. "I have fallen into the great indignity I have written against," wrote the young Thomas Merton, "I am a contemplative who is ready to collapse from overwork. This, I think, is a sin and the punishment of sin, but now, I have got to turn it to good use, and be a saint by it, somehow."(11)

When the community is the workaholic, several options emerge. Some members leave, but that is a risk, for they might find themselves in the same situation. Those who stay survive the community's workaholism by pursuing work with the adrenal courage of soldiers.

COUNTERPOINT: LEISURE, REST AND RECREATION

"Workaholics commit slow suicide by refusing to allow the child within them to play," says Dr. Lawrence Susser, a psychologist who also trained as a pediatrician.(12) Work and play are like contrapuntal melodies in one rhythmic movement. Where work invests energy that is self-fulfilling by reason of its product, play involves human effort that is immediately enjoyable in itself. A person will be more valuable to the community with the proper amount of leisure, rest and recreation. The inability to relax comes, not from the work itself, but from the wrong attitude towards work. Nothing purifies, focuses and ennobles work more than periods of non-activity. These periods dismantle one's defenses and internal forms of aggression.

Here are questions we might want to ask ourselves:

1. Do we find it difficult to sit, relax and enjoy being ourselves without having to follow a specific agenda?
2. Are our retreats, holydays and weekends planned in advance to accomplish some tasks or to catch up with a backlog of pending projects?
3. Do we feel uncomfortable at recreation unless our hands are busy at something all the time?

4. Are we experiencing feelings that we want to avoid, so that busyness makes those feelings beyond our reach?

5. Is recreation adulterated by shop talk and work concerns?

6. Do we use work projects and hobbies as buffers because we have difficulty communicating and relating with others on a person-to-person basis?

7. Do we keep processing work in our minds during prayer, at recreation, and at bedtime?

8. Do we play work-oriented, serious games?

9. Are we able to distinguish between work and hobby, and do we become aware when a hobby has turned into a time-consuming job, a career, or a business enterprise?

10. Do we have feelings of shame and guilt when we are not producing something tangible during retreats, holydays, weekends and in time of illness and convalescence?

If you answered yes to three or more of those questions, there is a chance that you are a workaholic or well on your way to becoming one.

After the Egyptian bondage, the Hebrews served God in worship, work and rest (Gen. 2:1-13). Repose affected even slaves and animals (Cf. Ps. 127:1-2). Aristotle considered recuperative rest and cheerful play as necessities of life. St. Thomas provides a fitting counterpoint to this Aristotelian ethic: "Therefore, unmitigated seriousness indicates a lack of virtue because it wholly despises play, which is as necessary for a good human life as rest is." (13) St. Thomas' philosophy of play is oriented towards a balanced humanness. He sets forth in detail the virtue of eutrapelia which enables the human person to relax, enjoy and play as a sign of a nobly formed character and a well integrated personality. (14)

DISSONANCE, HARMONY AND RECOVERY

Dr. Gerald G. May, director for spiritual guidance at Shalem Institute in Washington, D.C., claims that the neurological, psychological and spiritual dynamics of addiction are actively at work within every human being. "The same processes that are responsible for addiction to alcohol and narcotics," he explains, "are also responsible for addiction to ideas, work, relationships, power, mood swings,

fantasies, and an endless variety of things." (15) When we really want to do something, some form of addiction is bound to set in. A particular kind of personality distortion occurs with addiction, not as its cause but as its effect. (16)

Workaholism, like alcoholism, is both a substance and a process addiction. In alcoholism, the drinker is addicted to alcohol (substance), and to the process of drinking (getting drunk). Workaholics are addicted to the process of working and to the high adrenalin level in the body. Activism generates this body chemical. The energy surfeit overflows and tends to block the person's ability to monitor her bodily and psychological needs. This alienation from the body through workaholism is propelled by a self-generated and high adrenalin level. (17)

Stress-related illnesses eventually result from this process. The stress which a workaholic experiences is not due to work but rather comes from the attitude and feelings about work. Health problems are not caused by the hours of work. "Stress comes about when the process goes against your grain," says Dr. John Rhoades in the 1977 Journal of the Medical Association. Stress suppresses the body's immune system which then becomes susceptible to viral infection. Some stress-related illnesses are ulcers, gastro-intestinal problems, backaches, migraines, sleeping disorders, manic-euphoria, severe depression, memory losses and blackouts, and periods of temporary "comatose" during prayer. Stress is a side effect of worry, anxiety and poor work methods and organization. A healthy relationship with the work process is the key to the issue of human wholeness - physical, mental and spiritual. While the hands are busy at work, the mind and heart are clogged with the how-to. Mental activity is also doing, especially if it is an obsessive thinking that intrudes into prayer, rest and sleep. (18) Addiction erodes inner freedom and, moreover, it displaces and supplants God's love as the source and object of true desire. Adrian van Kaam formulates it this way: "Addiction is as fundamental a possibility of human life as is religious presence. As a matter of fact, they are so deeply interrelated that it can be said that addiction is a perverted religious presence that has lost its true object. Consequently, it enslaves instead of liberates the person." Van Kaam does not speak here of a specific type of addiction, but about the fundamental attitude which underlies the concrete forms and manifestations of any kind of addiction. It is this basic attitude which is a counterfeit of religious presence. (19)

Recovery from addiction needs the wisdom of hindsight, prayer, gentleness with self and with others. Recovery cannot be accomplished by mere effort and will power. It requires an

honest confrontation with the subtleties and liabilities of the addictive process in the light of God's grace. In the monastic tradition, work, like study, is an ascetical discipline that frees the nun/monk from the tyranny of the passions, not through the extirpation of the senses and bodily needs, but in their harmonious ordering toward a higher end: God and the spiritual life. We are not to deny the body what it needs nor pamper it beyond its needs. Extreme asceticism is just as dangerous and sensual as self-indulgence. Because of original sin, human integration is something to be attained through constant striving. Hence, the importance of self-knowledge and humility.

THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES:

The rhythm of action and contemplation has been a significant component of the monastic ideal for centuries. There is an intimate relation of work with worship and rest. Through the person's union with the Mystical Body of Christ and her solidarity with the human race, work is social, liturgical and eschatological. It perfects the created universe and prepares humankind for the second coming of Christ. Every Christian is called to upbuild the socio-economic order and to make it subject to redemptive grace. This contemporary Catholic thought had been adumbrated in biblical and early Christian writings. Work was ordained by God to be the rational creature's dynamic relation to the created universe and the expression of human dignity (Cf. Gen. 1:28). Work, in its fallen state, means suffering, oppression and death, which robs work of its lasting fruit. The alienation from and the penal aspect of work are not proper to its essence but are brought about by the performance of it (Cf. Gen 3:17; Ex. 1:11-14; Dt. 28:29b-33). Yet, because work is primarily an activity of God, it is also a way of return to him from disintegrality and alienation (Cf. Gen. 3:17-19). The human person as imago Dei shares in God's enabling spirit who is ceaselessly working in external events as well as within every human being. For God, work is not laborious, and his creative act is entirely free in its spontaneity. The dignity of work lies in its capacity to serve, enlighten and enrich human and Christian living. In work, we recapitulate the mission of Christ who became man to lead us back to the Father (Cf. LCM 104). The work entrusted to Christians through the second Adam empowers them to serve others in a deeply caring way (Cf. Mt. 20:26; 25:44; Pt. 4:8-11). Through Christ, we are all loved, accepted and have eternal worth. St. Paul's magna carta of human work has the dynamism of law because it is instructive, exhortatory and directional. Paul brings into focus the obligation of work into the very heart of being human, with its orientation towards a supernatural end in freedom of spirit (Cf. 2 Thess. 3:6-12).

Early in the 4th century, Athanasius, in his life of Antony, interiorized the value of work for Christians, stressing that it is a weapon against evil spirits;; it also forestalls temptations.(20) Ambrose of Milan, even before Augustine, perceived the interior-exterior dimension of human labor. For Ambrose, there is no virtue without labor, for labor is the genesis of virtue. He also taught an asceticism in which the virtues are precisely the virtues of Christ in us. We seek Christ, not the virtues.(21) Monasticism, in all ages, has discovered the necessity of tempering the work open to nuns/monks because obviously, not all types of work are compatible to a life of prayer, silence and enclosure (Cf. LCM 106: III, IV). Work is to be tested against the other elements of monastic life and must make room for the full humanity of each person. Work, with its counterpart of study, prayer, lectio and fasting, is an important aspect of ascetic poverty and of common life (Cf. LCM 105: I, II)> In Dominican monastic life, work is set in a wider perspective. It includes physical as well as intellectual work such as study, research and writing that are necessary and of service to the community (LCM 106: II).

Let us recall a few traditional themes from Augustine's writings that square with the present issue. We shall reinforce our essay by quoting a passage from R.A. Markus who comments on Augustine's thought about work:

Labor belongs only to man's growth and maturity. It belongs neither to his archetypal childhood innocence, nor to his fully human eschatological stature. It is a discipline, an askesis; but a discipline not of purgation and purification so much as of growth. But from the primal state of innocence, through the growing restoration of wholeness, to the final achievement of mature manhood, the dignity of work is man's privilege. It is a far cry from Adam's work, work "without the affliction of labor but with exhilaration of will" (The Literal Meaning of Genesis VIII, 8,15), to the work of toiling and sinful man. But in their essence, the two things remain the same: the worker "so to speak, lends his skill and ministry to God the creator in the service of nature" (ibid., IV, 16, 29) ... To the natural order as constituted by God, man brings his rational powers and voluntary activity to explore, to preserve and to enhance that power (ibid.). In this is to be found the excellence

and dignity of human work ... magna haec et omnino humano (The Magnitude of the Soul 33, 72) ... great and wholly human" --- that is his (Augustine's) verdict on human work and its achievement. (22)

Let us now sum up the praxis of this article with a Twelve-Step Program for re-integration: (23)

1. We admit that work has become the inalienable source of our identity and self-worth and that our power of loving is losing its freedom to addiction.

2. We pray for courage to reclaim our spontaneity and freedom of spirit (Cf. LCM I:V) and to transcend the downward drag of human compulsion which makes work a degradation proper to hurried slaves.

3. We have become more mindful that mere efficiency must not usurp the space and freedom reserved for love.

4. We shall nurture every present moment with serenity, joy and gratitude by doing one thing at a time - openly, fully and lovingly - without stifling the precious moment with tension, fussiness, anxiety and mental overloads of oncoming tasks.

5. We learn to prioritize by subordinating work to prayer and contemplation according to the spirit of the beatitudes (Cf. LCM 105:III; LCM 106:I), and we try to be flexible to events by reorganizing lesser priorities as needed.

6. We do not yield to pressure or attempt to pressure others. When we feel tense, we pause to be in touch with God, who is dynamically present in every individual's temperament and rhythm.

7. We keep in mind that offices and functions are not ways and means of possessing and controlling other persons or strategizing our behavior towards them. Offices and functions are channels of God's immanence in our daily living of the gospel.

8. We avoid work that creates feverish pressure and agitation and is, therefore, incompatible with a life of prayer. We strive to be free from work at some time each day and for a number of days during the year (Cf. LCM 106:III, IV).

9. We believe that the right attitude towards work and

a well-balanced distribution of work assignments are the key to the three-part harmony of seeking, finding and contemplating God.

10. We rejoice in fulfilling the designs of the triune God as we image his creative and redemptive act (Cf. LCM:104), through the harmonious blending of work, prayer, leisure and mature relationships.

11. We strive to make our community a wellspring for spiritual deepening and development and not just a place of human resources, utility and productivity.

12. We keep closely united with Christ who endowed work with a new power and dignity in a reconciled creation. Work is a freedom which prepares us for entry into God's eternal repose.

POSTLUDE

A PSALM MEDITATION

The Lord is my pace-setter, I shall not rush.
 He makes me stop and rest for quiet intervals;
 He provides me with images of stillness, which restore
 my serenity.
 He leads me in ways of efficiency through calmness of
 mind,
 And his guidance is peace.
 Even though I have great many things to accomplish
 each day
 I will not fret, for his presence is here.
 His timelessness, his all-importance will keep me in
 balance.
 He prepares refreshment and renewal in the midst of my
 activity
 By anointing my mind with his oils of tranquility.
 My cup of joyous energy overflows.
 Surely harmony and effectiveness shall be the fruit of
 my hours
 For I shall walk in the pace of my Lord and dwell in
 his House forever.(24)

NOTES

- 1 Meditations with Hildegard of Bingen, trans. Gabriele Uhlein (Santa Fe, NM: Bear and Company, 1982), p. 70.
- 2 Cf. Summa Theologia 2a, 2ae 187.3; 1a, 2ae 57.3-4; LCM 106:II,III.
- 3 Marilyn Machlowitz, Workaholics: Living with them, Working with them (Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1980), p. 11.
- 4 Diane Fassel, Working Ourselves to Death: the high cost of workaholism and the rewards of recovery (San Francisco: Harper-Collins Publishers, 1990), p. 30f.
- 5 Ibid., p. 27f.
- 6 Machlowitz, op. cit., pp. 17, 33-35, 43, 47.
- 7 Fassel, op. cit., p. 18.
- 8 Ibid., p. 23f.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 See Machlowitz, op. cit., p. 40f.
- 11 Thomas Merton, Sign of Jonas (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1953), p. 257.
- 12 Quoted in Machlowitz, op. cit., p. 100.
- 13 Nochomachean Ethics IV, 16, 854. Quoted in Hugo Rahner's Man at Play (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), p. 102.
- 14 Cf. Summa Theologia 2a, 2ae, 168. 2-4; Cf. Aristotle, Nichomachean Ethics X, 6, 1176 B; IV, 9, 1128 A; II, 7, 1108 A.
- 15 Gerald May, M.D., Addiction and Grace (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1988), p. 3f.
- 16 Ibid., p. 55.
- 17 Fassel, op. cit., p. 8-9.
- 18 Gerald May, M.D., The Awakened Heart; Living Beyond Addiction (San Francisco: Harper and Row Publishers, 1991), p. 213.

19. Adrian van Kaam, Personality Fulfillment in the Spiritual Life (William-Barre, PA: Dimension Books, 1966), p. 123.
20. Athanasius, The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus, trans. Robert C. Gregg (New York: Paulist Press, 1980), 3.50.53.
21. Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel, trans. John Savage (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1961), 2.2.8.
22. "Work and Worker in Early Christianity" in Work: Christian Thought and Practice (London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 1960), p. 23. Quoted in Sr. Agatha Mary, The Rule of St. Augustine: An Essay in Understanding (Villanova: Augustinian Press, 1992), p. 221.
23. A monastic adaptation of the 12-Step Program of Workaholic Anonymous (Los Angeles, CA: Workaholics Anonymous, 1991); Also Gerald May, op. cit., pp. 213-232.
24. A Japanese rendition of Psalm 23. Quoted in Basil Pennington, A Place Apart (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983), p. 83.

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FORMED BY THE WORD, TAUGHT BY THE SPIRIT, WE DARE TO STUDY

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What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man conceived,
what God has prepared for those who love him,
God has revealed to us through the Spirit.
For the Spirit searches everything,
even the depths of God.
1 Cor. 2:9-10

God, the Creator of all, has offered the human family the supernatural destiny of fellowship with himself. By his grace, the Holy Spirit poured into our hearts, we are raised to a new level of existence wherein we are rendered capable of this divine friendship. This elevation of our entire state of being happens primarily through a transformation of our natural capacities for knowing and loving. By the infused theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, it becomes possible for God to be the object of these human activities. By faith we believe in God and all that he has revealed, through Scripture and Tradition, about himself and our destiny. By hope we embrace God, trusting in his power to accomplish all that he has promised. Hope enables us to live in firm expectation of the resurrection and our eternal enjoyment of God in himself. By love we are drawn into God's own Trinitarian life. The Spirit dwelling in us enables us to love God with, as it were, his own love. Through the theological virtues then we are enabled to know and love God, to become friends with God.

While God invites all to this fellowship with himself in faith, hope and love, the way that this relationship is lived out differs according to the unique vocation of each person. For those called to Dominican monastic life there is a renunciation of various legitimate human concerns and pleasures in order to be "free for God alone." We embrace a whole way of life that is structured in such a way as to enable us to give as full expression as possible to this fellowship between God and his people and to be a sign of its fulfillment in the Kingdom when "God will be all in all." This eschatological way of life is fostered by certain observances. One of these is theological study. In fact this observance is considered to be one of the outstanding observances, along with common life, the celebration of the liturgy and private prayer, and the observance of the vows. Why is sacred study accorded such an important place?

A closer look at what the Constitutions say about study

reveals that this observance is considered to be a means of both basic human development and one that pertains to our specific vocation in the Church. Concerning basic human development we read that study is an aid to human maturity, removes impediments that arise from ignorance, informs the practical judgment, and aids mental equilibrium. So we can see that on a very fundamental level study is an important means of human fulfillment and integrity. It is an activity which actualizes our potential: "Created minds, because their being is not infinite, are only potential of being in general, and are actualized by the things they understand."¹ It also perfects our nature, for "as a creature endowed with reason man's primary object is the acquisition of knowledge. Whenever, therefore, his understanding is deepened, his nature is brought correspondingly to its perfection."²

Another reason given by the Constitutions for observing the discipline of study is that it nourishes faith and contemplation. How does it do so, we might ask? To address this question and to further legitimize the importance of study in the life of the Dominican nun is the main burden of the following pages. We will begin by considering faith, sacred study and contemplation separately and then attempt to explain the relationship of these activities to one another. Faith will be considered first as this is the disposition from which arise the other two activities.

Faith is the gift whereby God raises our natural ability of knowing and makes it capable of having him as its object. Through faith we come to share in God's own knowledge of himself. We do this not by understanding but by assenting to the propositions of the faith. We assent to these propositions or revealed truths because we believe him who has revealed them. God, while not being directly perceived, remains the formal object of faith. The direct, immediate perception towards which our assent tends, is reserved for the blessed in heaven for whom the light of faith has given way to the light of glory. Only then will we see God as he is and know him with the full capacity of our intellects. "Here in this life God presents himself to the mind, not as evoking or making possible an act of intellectual vision, but as calling forth the only other cognitional union possible with him -- belief."³ This cognitional union prepares us for the beatific vision and "can therefore be defined by Thomas as a habit of mind whereby eternal life is begun in us."⁴

Faith's act, belief, is essentially an act of the intellect but an imperfect one that thrusts us toward our ultimate end of the vision of God. "The mind of its nature strives towards its own completion."⁵ Belief as a knowing is inherently imperfect: "in so far as the light is not shared completely, the unfulfillment of the mind is not completely overcome and so the pondering movement of the mind goes on restlessly."⁶ It will reach completion only when the "light is shared completely." In the meantime faith must be nourished and our minds kept moving

toward their proper end.

If the mind is not nourished with Truth, the perfect contemplation of which is its final end, it will get sidetracked. For "whoever turns away from his due end must needs substitute an undue one, since every agent acts for an end."⁷ In other words, if the mind is not occupied with God and the things of God it will choose other ends. In the cloistered life of the Dominican nun, where there has been a renunciation of ordinary human concerns, this sidetracking could result in, for example, an excessive preoccupation with one's health, or work, or other people and their affairs.

The mind can be occupied with whatever it wants. It is up to the will to direct it. Our desire for the good and the true must be guided -- our faith must be nourished. Whereas "the knowledge given with the light of glory remains permanently in the intellect of the blessed in heaven,"⁸ here it requires a continual choice. Because "appetite depends on knowledge,"⁹ we can only continue to make the choice for our proper end by deepening our knowledge in faith. And since "a different level of knowledge means a different level of desiring,"¹⁰ the more we know God and the things of God the more we desire him. It is this increasing desire that will prevent us from getting sidetracked and keep us moving toward our proper end.

"Faith in us is a divine knowing, a definite communication of God's knowledge. But this communication is rather imperfect and the human spirit naturally desires a fuller grasp of the objects revealed."¹¹ We are therefore impelled to deepen our grasp of this knowledge of God in himself and what he has done for us. "This grasp can be sought either by supernatural activity in a vital manner and tending to imitate the mode of apprehension of God himself, [i.e. through contemplation] or by a properly intellectual activity which follows our human mode and is on the whole the work of theology."¹² In other words, contemplation and study are two ways in which we deepen our grasp of the object of faith. Let us now look more closely at each of these activities, beginning with study.

What is sacred study? We have described faith as an assent to the Truth who is the Triune God and the mysteries of his plan of salvation which have been revealed to us. This revelation generates a whole body of knowledge which invites inquiry. Theology is the reasoned investigation into this body of knowledge. Practiced under the guiding light of faith it systematically delves into and explores the meaning of the explicit as well as the implicit divine truths contained in revelation. This activity involves the use of one's intellect, which has been raised by grace above its natural capacity, in an attempt to grasp discursively the truths of the Christian faith. In discussing the activity of theology Congar states that here "the penetration of the object is made by rational activity, according to the laws and methods of intelligence or, more

precisely, reason."¹³ In short, theology is faith seeking understanding.

This rational activity would, however, remain sterile were it not for the Holy Spirit's gifts of Knowledge and Understanding which help us to enter into the mysteries we study. "The activity of faith is taken to a higher degree of perfection by the gift of Knowledge."¹⁴ The person operating under the Spirit's gift of Knowledge possesses the ability to make a "simple and almost instinctive judgement by which it is possible to discern what has to be believed from what should not be believed."¹⁵ This gift which helps to perfect our faith gives us a taste for, a sensitivity to the mysteries we study.

"The action of the Holy Spirit working through the Gift of Understanding also perfects faith and makes it capable of a certain inner penetration, the peak of which is negative in meaning. It does this by means of a keen appreciation of God's transcendence...."¹⁶ In this way we learn what God is not and are continually liberated from false images of him. We begin to discover that God is no-thing, but rather the Source of everything. There "occurs a deepening of the darkness, but it is one that paradoxically illumines."¹⁷ This learning of what God is not is essential. For "man reaches the highest point of his knowledge about God when he knows that he knows him not."¹⁸

The precise nature of the interplay between our activity and the Spirit's is a mystery. For,

in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit the position of the human mind is one of moved rather than mover. And, therefore here too, there can be no question of how and how much. It would, after all, be absurd arrogance to attempt to discover the 'rules' by which the Holy Spirit of God permeates man's reflections and decisions.¹⁹

Were it not for these gifts of the Spirit our study of theology would be lifeless. "A merely thinking theology, even though deriving from faith, is not a fully living theology unless quickened by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, and can be a rather arid study of concepts."²⁰

It is important to note, however, that while the gifts quicken our study it is still a "thinking theology." While we "have the anointing that comes from the Holy One, so that all knowledge" is ours, (cf 1 Jn. 2:20) this knowledge that we have through the Spirit dwelling in us is not angelic knowledge. It is not an immediate apprehension of the Truth but one that comes to us in ways that respect the nature God has given us.

St. Thomas frequently observes how the operations of grace, though taking us far

beyond, observe the modes of the operations of nature...the human mind is not stilled by forms from another world, but must wrestle with this one and discover what lies behind and beyond by ranging from point to point. This discursus is present even in the activity of divine faith.²¹

The objection might be raised: if the Word is Truth, why is it not enough simply to read the Scriptures? In other words, what does study contribute to the monastic person's primary occupation of *lectio divina*? The Constitutions answer this by saying that sacred study is a fruitful preparation for *lectio*. Once again we must inquire further and ask how it prepares us for *lectio*. There are many ways in which it does so.

Scripture is "not merely a simple human testimony on the action of God, nor even, as could be inferred from certain Protestant works, a force hidden under the letter which would act on the souls of its readers by its existential dynamism."²² Hence our reading of the sacred texts must be enlightened and intelligent. The discipline of study helps it to be so in a variety of ways. First, as was mentioned above, study helps us to develop as persons. It actualizes our potential and perfects our nature. Thus the person that we bring to the text is a fuller one, someone who is more ripe for the relationship that *lectio* is. Secondly, sacred study trains the mind to ask questions and therefore when we sit down with the text of Scripture it is more apt to be the real and intelligent dialogue that it is meant to be.

Liam Walsh, O.P., in discussing study in the life of the Dominican nuns, said that "the only time the human mind stops asking questions is at the Parousia."²³ We, while eagerly awaiting the Parousia, must always guard against a spiritual death wherein our intellects have atrophied and we do in fact stop asking questions about the faith. Study is one of the ways that we do this.

At this point it might be helpful to insert a word of caution about the dangers of the opposite extreme which, interestingly enough, Thomas posited as the more serious danger. We must guard against an immoderate curiosity and the asking of so many questions that we lose the ability and the requisite stillness to listen to the answers. There is also another danger that might be pointed out -- that of overemphasizing the intellectual life to such an extent that we fail to take into account individual differences. The Constitutions are quite clear that study is to be undertaken according to the capacity of each sister.

The Scriptures contain a whole world view, a map as it were of God's view of reality. Studying the contents in a systematic way helps us to penetrate that vantage point more precisely, to

explore the fine details and to gain access to the annotations, if you will, of those who have previously journeyed through and made their home in that territory. In other words, another way that study prepares us for sacred reading is by offering us access to the fruits of others', centuries of others, pondering and expounding of the mysteries contained therein. When we have been exposed to and have grappled with these treasures, we are inclined not only to ask questions but, the right questions. We learn how the Church has understood and explicated the truths contained in Scripture and our own reading of the sacred texts is thus guided along the lines of orthodoxy.

Having pierced more deeply into the biblical world we know it more fully and are shaped by this knowledge. Our lives are changed and are brought into closer conformity with the way that God knows the world to be, i.e., with Truth. This living of the truth approaches the purity of heart to which is promised the vision of God. Study then quite spontaneously leads to and spills over into the other activity to which we will now turn our attention -- contemplation.

The way that people have understood the activity signified by the word contemplation has undergone drastic changes over the centuries. Simon Tugwell, O.P., has suggested that the word be dropped for fifty years or so until christians get a hold of it.²⁴ The history of what this word has meant is long and complex and beyond the scope of this paper. Let us just say that the working definition used here will be that of the mind delighting in the Truth. We can speak of the mind enjoying the First Truth, and this is perhaps the primary sense of the term. But we can also speak of the mind enjoying the truth that resides in all things because, as created reality, they participate in and reflect the Being of that First Truth who is God.

Contemplation differs from theology in that, while having the same Truth as its object, it is a resting in or gazing upon it as possessed, rather than a grappling with it. "It is intuitive rather than discursive because it is chiefly a vision rather than an investigation or study."²⁵ By describing contemplation in this way we are defining it as a primarily intellectual activity but one which also involves the emotions and the will. How are all of these faculties involved?

We must now speak more specifically of the theological virtue of charity and the Spirit's gift of Wisdom which perfects it. "With charity there is the experience of being in love with God, of the reality believed in; this in turn becomes the basis for a cognitive experience that sustains and deepens faith."²⁶ This cognitive experience is the work of the Spirit's gift of Wisdom.

Wisdom's primary work is contemplative, the appreciative gazing on the loveliness of God. The intellect is moved by the impulse of the

Spirit to penetrate the deep things of God. Yet we must note that while this knowledge is profound and rich it is not clear. Its perfection is not to be understood by analogies with rational and abstract knowledge, but rather with the obscure process whereby a lover comes to know his beloved, or to the poetic experience whereby a person is grasped strongly and yet inarticulately by the beautiful.²⁷

In combining wisdom with charity Thomas shows his genius at work. Here he is making explicit use of the theme of the reciprocal influence of reason and appetite that was alluded to earlier when we spoke of the necessity of nurturing our faith.

He binds together knowing and willing, seeing and loving. His basic insight is this: knowledge of the goodness of an object causes us to love it; love then brings about a different and better knowledge; this new appreciation deepens the love which, in turn, intensifies the appreciation, and so on.²⁸

With great profundity Thomas "recognizes that love is more unitive than knowledge in seeking the thing not the thing's reason; its bent is to a real union though this can only be constituted by knowledge."²⁹ The union is constituted by knowledge because in knowing the knower and the known are one.

It should be evident that contemplation is not understood here as some Neoplatonic flight into another realm but a deeper penetration into the reality of things and of God himself as a result of our union with him in faith and charity. "By the superhuman force of a grace-given love, man may become one with God to such an extent that he receives, so to speak, the capacity and the right to see created things from God's point of view...."³⁰ One with the Father in the Son through the gift of the Spirit we begin to know things with God's own knowledge of them.

The eye of perfected friendship with God is aware of the deeper dimensions of reality.... To those who have this greater love of God the truth of real things is revealed more plainly and brilliantly; above all the supernatural reality of the Trinitarian God is made known to them more movingly and overwhelmingly.³¹

This is christian contemplation -- perceiving God and his reflection in all things. It is both an act and a way of life, the fulness of which awaits the beatific vision. Now we see

dimly as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face.

Our study and our contemplation are two distinct activities which both arise out of a faith which is animated by charity and perfected by the gifts of the Spirit. Sharing the same source they also share the same direct object -- the triune God. Both activities result in an acquisition of knowledge, one which is the fruit of the reasoning process and the other the result of an experience of the same realities. This experience comes about as the Spirit's gift of Wisdom confers a certain connaturality on us and we know things through a kinship with them. The mind

sees and tastes how all God's works are traceable to his mercy; it tastes the difference between love and justice in God; it knows God's goodness because it 'suffers' that goodness; it is thoroughly convinced of God's awesome power because it has been brushed by that power and sometimes almost crushed by that power; it understands God's peace because it is immersed in that peace....³²

Hence, while it is the same realities that are known, the mode of the knowledge is different.

To summarize: theology is the reasoned investigation, under the light of faith, into the mysteries of God that have been revealed to us through Scripture and Tradition. This activity involves the use of one's intellect in an attempt to grasp rationally the truths of the faith. Contemplation is the experiential, intuitive encounter with the Truth who is God, a Trinity of persons. It is an act of the intellect which is also an encounter in love. Theology involves a great deal of disciplined human effort and activity -- an activity, however, which is performed in co-operation with the Spirit. In contemplation the person is passive and at rest because it has attained the goal for which it was striving. The attainment of this goal is sheer gift. Whereas in theology we are straining toward God, engaging all our human powers, in contemplation he bends down to us. But this bending down occurs in a way that respects the nature he has given us, i.e., God does not impose himself on us as an alien force but rather elevates our faculties to enable us to receive him as a friend. In contemplation a deeper sensitivity to divine things is born which in turn sharpens our facility for perceiving reflections of the divine in all of created reality and for penetrating the mysteries that we study. Both together help us to see (albeit in faith) the good more clearly. Hence, our wills are impelled to an increasingly ardent reaching out toward the good in both study and prayer.

The two activities of theology and contemplation are indeed distinct. But for a person in love with God and gifted by the Spirit, they are simply two intimately connected activities that

support and flow in and out of one another as the person gropes her way in faith and in the hope of the blessed day when she shall see, face to face, him for whom she longs. Then the dark knowledge of faith will give way to the clear knowledge of vision.

Friends do not usually analyze their relationship in terms of various activities and of who is contributing what to the relationship and in what way. They are simply so caught up with each other that distinctions of this sort seem to vanish. So it is with doing theology and contemplating. Sometimes we are exerting a disciplined rational effort in order to attain a deeper understanding of the mystery of God and his economy of salvation. Other times we are simply resting in the divine Truth who has bent down to us and raised us up to share in his own knowledge of things and in the mystery of his own Triune life. We only step back to consider the relationship between these two complementary activities with the hope that the clarity gained will serve to foster growth in all aspects of the relationship and enable us to articulate and share what we have received with our friends and communities.

In conclusion, we have seen that theological study, which arises out of faith and spills over into contemplation, is a legitimate and important activity in our lives as Dominican nuns. It both assists us to grow as human persons and to live our specifically eschatological vocation. Study frees us from false images of God and makes us alive to the truth and goodness of all things. This in turn leads to a deeper concern for the ultimate fulfillment of all of creation, especially that of our fellow human beings, all of whom God desires as his friends. Thus charity comes to perfection within us and we are shaped into more faithful co-operators in the work of redemption. We become true friends and servants of God who ardently long for, are moving toward, and fixed upon that day when "God will be all in all."

NOTES

1. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, ed. Timothy McDermott, (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1989) lae 79, ad 2.

2. Per Erik Persson, Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970) 36.

3. T.C. O'Brien, Appendix 1 "Objects and Virtues" in Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, Vol 31, gen. ed. Thomas Gilby (New York: McGraw Hill, 1972) 185.

Please note: all subsequent references to the Summa Theologiae and its appendices will be abbreviated ST and taken from this edition.

4. Persson, 28.
5. Thomas Aquinas, III Sentences 23,2,2,i quoted by T. C. O Appendix 4 "Belief's Act" ST Vol. 31,207.
6. Thomas Aquinas, De Veritate XIV 1 ad 5 quoted by O'Brien, "Belief's Act", 214.
7. ST 2a2ae, 45, 1 ad 1.
8. Persson, 28.
9. ST 1a 79, ad 2.
10. ST 1a 80, 2 ad 1.
11. Yves M.J.Congar, A History of Theology (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968)93.
12. Congar, 94.
13. Congar, 205.
14. Congar, I Believe in the Holy Spirit, Vol II (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 137.
15. Congar, 136.
16. Congar, 136.
17. William J. Hill, The Three-Personed God (Washington:Catholic University Press, 1982) 258.
18. Thomas Aquinas, On the Power of God, trans. English Dominican Fathers (Westminster: Newman Press, 1952) VII 5 ad 14.
19. Josef Pieper, The Four Cardinal Virtues (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 1965) 38.
20. ST 1a 1, ad 7 footnote k.
21. Thomas Gilby, Appendix 5 "Sacra Doctrina", in Vol 1 ST , 58-59.
22. P. Grelot, Interpreting the Scriptures (New York: Desclee Co.,1969) 211.
23. Liam Walsh, O.P., "Dominican Study and the Experience of God" in Dominican Monastic Search, November 1984, 56.
24. Simon Tugwell, O.P. from talks given at Our Lady of Grace Monastery, N. Guilford, CT, July 1985.
25. Jordan Aumann, Appendix 3 "Contemplation" in Vol. 46, ST, 103.

26. T. C. O'Brien, Appendix 3 "Faith and the Truth about God" in Vol. 31, ST 204.
27. Thomas R. Heath, Appendix 4 "The Gift of Wisdom" in Vol. 35, ST, 201.
28. Heath, 200.
29. Thomas Gilby, Appendix 10 "The Dialectic of Love in The Summa" in Vol. 1 ST, 129.
30. Pieper, 39.
31. Pieper, 39-40.
32. Heath, 201.



ETERNAL
TRINITY!
O GODHEAD!

YOU, ETERNAL TRINITY,
ARE A DEEP SEA: THE
MORE I ENTER YOU THE
MORE I DISCOVER, AND
THE MORE I DISCOVER,
THE MORE I SEEK YOU.

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

The first part of the paper discusses the importance of the study and the objectives of the research. It highlights the need for a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and the role of the researcher in this process. The second part of the paper presents the methodology used in the study, including the data collection methods and the analysis techniques. The third part of the paper discusses the results of the study and the conclusions drawn from the findings. The fourth part of the paper discusses the implications of the study and the future research directions. The fifth part of the paper discusses the limitations of the study and the strengths of the research. The sixth part of the paper discusses the contributions of the study to the field of research. The seventh part of the paper discusses the ethical considerations of the study and the measures taken to ensure the integrity of the research. The eighth part of the paper discusses the funding sources of the study and the acknowledgments of the researchers. The ninth part of the paper discusses the references used in the study and the bibliography of the research. The tenth part of the paper discusses the appendices of the study and the supplementary materials of the research.

THEOLOGICAL STUDY IN THE LIFE OF DOMINICAN CONTEMPLATIVE NUNS

Sister Mary of the Trinity, O.P.
Farmington Hills, MI

The insertion of study as an observance into the 1987 Constitutions challenges individuals, monasteries, and Conferences or Federations to take up theological study in a serious and disciplined way. The U.S. Conference has responded by initiating a Theological Study Formation Program for the newer members of the monasteries. It is as a participant that I offer this reflection. It grew out of an assignment in which we were asked to reflect on the importance of theological study in the life of Dominican contemplative nuns. The plan of the paper is (1) to interpret the terms "theological study" and "Dominican contemplative nun"; (2) to indicate the convergence and divergence between contemplation and theology; (3) to demonstrate the importance of theological study as a constitutive element in the life of the nuns.

Theological Study

The word theology comes from the Greek theos, God, and logos, thought or speech.¹ Theology one might say is thinking and conversing about God. What are the limits of theological discourse? This could of course be researched and developed at length but for the purpose of this paper perhaps I may suggest two inter-related questions. In most contemporary Catholic theology one reflects on (1) human experience in the light of (2) the sources of faith. In this approach tradition mediates meaning.

When contemporary theologians reflect on human experience in the light of tradition, what develops is not a theology but a multiplicity of diverse theologies. Theological pluralism is not, Fr. Hill suggests, a pluralism of beliefs, because one faith assures a continuity or cohesion in the theological endeavor. He comments:

Such theological pluralism seems irreversible and irremedial (sic), and moreover is one that crosses confessional lines. Its deepest source is awareness of the finitude of all human knowing. If on the one hand it has opened the way to bewilderment, producing a crisis of theological identity making constructive theology difficult, on the other it recalls to theology that its

¹ F. E. Peters, Greek Philosophical Terms, (New York: New York University Press, 1967), pp.110, 194.

² William Hill, O.P., "Theology," The New Dictionary of Theology, J.A. Komonchak, ed. (Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987), p.1012.

goal remains mystery that is incomprehensible and ineffable.³

What is it about theology that allows it to put one in touch with Mystery? Is it the texts which enshrine the Christian experience? Is it what these texts seek to mediate: the deepest questions of the human heart? Or is it simply the finitude of the human acts of knowing and loving that brings us face to face with our need for the Infinite? Another author speaks of how knowing and loving open one to Mystery.

In every act of knowing and loving I am restlessly striving beyond my present situation toward a horizon which I can never reach but which is inescapably present to me....Can I content myself with limited areas of knowledge and choice or do I allow myself to be open to Mystery, which is always present to me but which I can never manipulate or control.⁴

Perhaps it is the questions that theology goes after that bring one to a meeting with the ineffable and incomprehensible. Eric Voegelin writing about "Question and Mystery" in The Ecumenic Age says: "The Question [the Question capitalized is not a question concerning the nature of this or that object in the eternal world but a structure inherent to the experience of reality] is not just any question but the quest concerning the mysterious ground of all Being."⁵

Theology might be thought of as a meeting place for mind and heart. The heart's reasons bear on the activity of the mind and likewise the mind's reasons bear on the heart. Perhaps theology is at its best when one is brought into a wondering awe in the presence of Mystery and seeks to articulate the experience intelligently. Theological discourse stretches one beyond the narrative and symbolic expression of the primary sources of the faith into the realm (sometimes called a realm of theory) wherein one seeks to objectify and communicate some aspect of Mystery within one's contemporary culture.

³ Ibid., p.1017.

⁴ John O'Donnell, S.J., "Faith," The New Dictionary of Theology, p.375.

⁵ Eric Voegelin, The Ecumenic Age (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1974), p.320.

Dominican Contemplatives Nuns

A Dominican nun is first of all a Christian woman who through her baptism has accepted the challenge to live out Jesus' twofold commandment of love. Being a Dominican contemplative means further that she chooses to live out her commitment in a specific and radical way, namely by withdrawal from the world, and sharing in a common life which is dedicated to prayer, study and work. Nuns are primarily remember-ers. Dominican monastic life gives primacy to remembering and pondering the Word of God. In the chapter of the Constitutions entitled "Hearing, Studying, and Keeping the Word of God" the nuns are reminded: "The purpose of all regular observance, especially enclosure and silence, is that the Word of God may dwell abundantly in the Monastery."⁶ This chapter highlights two observances in which Word comes to dwell in the cloister: *lectio divina* and study.

In the practice of *lectio* the nuns follow an ancient monastic practice in imitation of their founder, St. Dominic. It was said of Dominic that he always had the Scriptures close at hand and passed easily from *meditatio* to *oratio* and from *oratio* to *contemplatio*.

In reading the section on study in the current Constitutions one sees that study is meant to be formative in the life of the nuns.

It [study] not only nourishes contemplation, but also removes the impediments which arise through ignorance and informs the practical judgment. In this way it fosters the fulfillment of the evangelical counsels with a more enlightened fidelity and encourages unanimity of mind. By its very constancy and difficulty it constitutes a form of asceticism and aids mental equilibrium.

The Constitutions indicate that suitable time needs to be provided for study and libraries kept well supplied and up to date. It is also suggested that the prioress arrange for lectures and conferences to help promote study in the community.

In summary, a Dominican contemplative nun is a woman whose "whole life is harmoniously ordered to preserving the continual

⁶ L.C.M. #96, II.

⁷ The Nine ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic, edited and translated by Simon Tugwell O.P. (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987) pp. 42-44.

⁸ L.C.M. # 100, II.

remembrance of God."⁹ And, she remembers God's presence primarily through the observances of lectio and study. Conviction of the primacy of these observances has grown out of the opportunity and challenge of serious daily study for participants in the Conference Theological Study Formation Program. It seems that lectio and study serve our remembering in direct proportion to the disciplined effort made toward their observance.

Theology and Contemplation

Before attempting to show the relationship between theology and contemplation, the meaning of the latter needs to be set out. Contemplation not only tends to be an ambiguous term but in some quarters it also carries with it rather esoteric connotations. The following is a brief indication of what is intended here by the term contemplation.

The early Greek Fathers of the Church borrowed the word *theoria* from the Neoplatonists in an effort to explain the Christian mystery.¹⁰ For the Neoplatonists *theoria* was the highest activity of those seeking wisdom; it was an intellectual vision of truth. The Fathers added to *theoria* the meaning of the Hebrew term *da'ath*, which is a kind of experiential knowledge which comes through love. The Fathers' expanded meaning for *theoria* was translated into Latin as *contemplatio*. Near the end of the sixth century Gregory the Great summed up the tradition by describing contemplation as a knowledge of God that is impregnated with love.

In the monastic tradition contemplation came to be viewed as the full flowering of the practice of lectio. One begins in *meditatio*, moves or is moved to *oratio* and comes to rest in *contemplatio*, a formless, imageless resting in God. In the stillness of contemplation one no longer actively seeks but the mind and heart come to rest in what they have desired.¹¹ Contemplation is then simply a resting in Truth that is beyond word or image.

Lectio begins in a meditative reflection upon some source of faith and ends in contemplation. The study of theology parallels lectio in that it also begins in a reflection upon the sources of faith and ends in contemplation. For is not the moment in which one comes to know a moment of grasping reality without words or

⁹ L.C.M. # 74, IV.

¹⁰ Thomas Keating, O.C.S.O., Finding Grace at the Center (Massachusetts: St. Bede Publications, 1978) pp.33-36.

¹¹ Ibid. p.37.

images; an act of contemplation, a resting in what is? To express one's contemplation, of course, one falls back upon images or words to help mediate one's knowing.

If contemplation and theology begin and end in the same place is there a distinction between them? In *lectio* one begins with images, words, and moves toward relinquishing them to rest in God. In theology one works at staying with the thinking, understanding, judging, deciding in the hope of coming to know reality. And, one often seeks to "objectify and universalize one's contemplation in order to communicate one's knowledge to another."¹²

Another way of saying the difference between theology and contemplation might be to say that in prayer we are turned toward God as lovers and loving becomes a way of knowing, while in study we are turned toward God as knowers and knowing becomes a way of loving.

Theological Study as Constitutive of the Life of Dominican Contemplative Nuns

Is the study of theology part of the monastic tradition? The case for theology in the life of monks and nuns from the beginnings of monasticism is presented with great erudition by Jean Leclercq in his book *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*. In the chapter entitled "Monastic Theology" he traces theology in monastic life backs to its roots and makes a strong case for the existence of theological study in the monasteries.¹³

The current Constitutions (1987) indicate that those in formation should be instructed in Sacred Scripture, liturgy, church history, the history of spirituality and of the Order, dogmatic and moral theology.¹⁴ And, in the section on study or on-going formation for the community the Constitutions recommend that the nuns nourish their faith on the mystical teaching of the Fathers, St. Thomas, and other theologians and authors.¹⁵

In a religious Order which celebrates truth, it seems that an openness to the gifts of mind and heart would be essential for understanding and communicating truth. Fr. Bernard Lonergan suggests: "Religious experience at its root is experience of an

¹² Thomas Philippe O.P., The Contemplative Life (New York: Crossroads Pub., 1990) p.92.

¹³ Jean Leclercq O.S.B., The Love of Learning and the Desire for God (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), Chapter 9.

¹⁴ L.C.M. # 119, II.

¹⁵ L.C.M. # 101, III.

unconditional and unrestricted being in love. But what we are in love with, remains something we have to find out."¹⁶ And, is it not study, culminating in contemplation, that brings one to the moment of the question: What is it that I am in love with?

Further light is shed on the mind/heart connection in an article by Fr. Liam Walsh in which he speaks about a mystical movement in study. He says: "What happens is that study begins to bring us to the point of total renunciation of ideas and images."¹⁷ The relinquishing of forms and images in lectio moves toward surrender of the heart, while total renunciation of ideas and images in study moves toward surrender of the mind. It is an integrated process which first requires the development and flowering of the gifts of mind and heart. Fr. Walsh goes on to say:

The really profound students have come to realize through their study that the truest ideas are the ones which are almost negative, the most fragile ones, those which almost disappear. The great metaphysical ideas are couched in the thinnest, most transparent terms....Study itself brings one to the point of realizing that one must eventually say 'no' to knowledge, not in the sense of discounting it and putting it aside, but because reality is far beyond it.¹⁸

Serious study for nuns, in light of these remarks, would need to be more than an extra tucked into an already packed day. Is it not both a challenge and an opportunity for a total gift of oneself to God?

If one of the main reasons for studying theology is to become intelligent conversants in God-talk, the question arises, how does this really fit into a life given over to so much silence, solitude, and prayer?

First, one might suggest that there are those nuns who will find it necessary and will be driven to "objectify and universalize their contemplation" even if only to themselves. And this, it seems, will require learning 'God-talk,' the language of theology. Someone in the Study Program commented that theological

¹⁶ Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., Philosophy of God and Theology (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973), p.51.

¹⁷ Liam Walsh, O.P., "Dominican Study and the Experience of God," A lecture given at the 1984 General Assembly of the U.S. Conference of Dominican Nuns and printed in Vol. 3 of Monastic Search.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 63.

study is something like learning a foreign language especially in the beginning when you need to build up a vocabulary just to start to get the gist of what is being discussed.

Second, the Constitutions state in the article on Common Life: "Provision should be made for conversation on doctrinal or spiritual life. These may be held at determined times either in groups or between two nuns."¹⁹ If nuns are encouraged to converse with one another on doctrinal or spiritual matters surely as Dominicans we would look for these to be as intelligent as possible and out of a theologically enlightened viewpoint.

Third, since the nuns have re-captured much of the monastic tradition formerly lost to them for several centuries (sacred study being part of that retrieval), there arises the need to pass on this tradition. This would call for theologically articulate formators to impart this re-newed tradition in a coherent and intelligent way to new members.

Fourth, it seems Dominic in founding an Order of Nuns and Friars intended some kind of continuing conversation between these two branches as a means of mutual encouragement and support. Fr. Walsh commenting on this relationship suggests:

The working out of that relationship involves a sharing in each others' concerns and an ability to hold conversation with each other. I believe that if the nuns are to relate to their brothers who are actively engaged in the ministry of preaching, in a way that Dominic wanted that to happen, they need to understand the kind of questions with which they have to deal and the kind of answers which they have to offer in their preaching. I believe that before the nuns can carry their preaching brethren in their hearts they have to carry them also in their minds.²⁰

Fifth, Jean Leclercq states that one of the reasons theology was done in the monasteries was because of the existence of an

¹⁹ L.C.M. # 6, II.

²⁰ Liam Walsh, O.P., op. cit. p.59. As pertinent examples, I recall a meeting in our monastery between some of the students in the Study Program and a visiting Friar to talk about the philosophy (his field) course we had just completed, and the chance for a profitable conversation with Fr. William Hill about his book The Three Personed God, at the House of Studies this past summer. These conversations could not have taken place without the opportunity for serious study launched by the Conference Study Program.

audience. Nuns do write letters, receive visitors, and some nuns publish.

In considering how theological study fits into the life of the nuns, it is instructive to consider the lived experience. In a life where one is likely to experience many "desert" or "dark" times and one has no outward apostolate to capture one's imagination and expend energy on, the study of theology, as Constitution #100, II suggests, is a necessary aid to human maturity and mental equilibrium. Thomas Philippe says it this way:

The support given by theology is nothing in comparison with that which the Holy Spirit can give us interiorly through love. But when the Spirit is silent, this presentation of the doctrines of faith can sometimes be a help.²¹

One of the most interesting descriptions or explanations of those "desert, silent, or dark times" is found in the writings of Jan Ruusbroec in his description of the inner life of the Trinity as the "Common Life." Ruusbroec describes the movement within the Trinity as a movement from silence to speech then back into silence, then again into speech and so on and so forth. The silence is the Father, a darkness, a moment of rest; the movement into speech or manifestation is the Word, a light, a moment of work. The Trinity moves back and forth in a constant ebb and flow from silence to speech from speech to silence in an unending ebb and flow. Perhaps one might think of this movement, the ebbing and flowing, as the Spirit.

Ruusbroec suggests that the Christian life is an invitation to become caught up with the Word in the ebb and flow from silence to speech, darkness to light, rest to work in a unending movement in which one is caught up in the eternal ebb and flow of the Trinity.²²

If Ruusbroec's description is on the mark then perhaps the life of the nuns might be a place in which theological study as a regular observance might indeed fall easily into this inner divine rhythm because of the constant movement between *lectio*/contemplation and theology/contemplation. Perhaps one finds an example of being caught up in this Trinitarian movement in the lives of some of the early Fathers of the Church. For it seems they theologized because they contemplated and they contemplated because they theologized. Contemplation leads into theology and theology back into contemplation in a constant ebb and flow.

²¹ Philippe, *Ibid.* p.95.

²² Louis Dupre, The Common Life (New York: Crossroads, 1984), pp.26-27.

Lastly, in writing on affectivity in Thomas Aquinas's spirituality, Fr. Walter Principe reminds his readers that love in Thomas's spirituality is always guided by knowledge and wisdom. He says:

His [Aquinas's] spirituality is a spirituality of the Word as well as of the Holy Spirit of Love. For Thomas, loving friendship with God should result from the mind's eager pursuit of wisdom. Thus he [Thomas] says:

The study of wisdom is very sublime because through it we especially reach a likeness to God, who made all things in wisdom [Ps 103(104):24]. So, because love is caused by likeness, the study of wisdom especially joins us with God in friendship, which is why Wis 7:14 says that wisdom is an infinite treasure for human beings; those who use it become sharers in friendship with God (ScGen 1.2.).²³

The mind's eager pursuit of wisdom through the study of theology is, it seems, a privileged moment of contemplation, and an appropriate endeavor for the nuns of the Order whose lives are totally given over to knowing/loving God.

²³ Walter Principe, C.S.B., "Affectivity and the Heart in Thomas Aquinas' Spirituality." Spiritualities of the Heart, ed. Annice Callahan, R.S.C.J. (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1990), p.59.

THE WORK OF THE MASTER'S HAND
Letters and Vision of Fr. Damian Byrne, O.P.

Sr. Mary Regina, O.P.
 Farmington Hills, MI

Who is Damian Byrne, O.P.? We all know his credentials: born in Ireland, Dominican missionary to Argentina, Vicar of Religious in Trinidad, Provincial and gentle arbitrator in Mexico, Provincial to his Dominican Family in Ireland, and then in 1983, out of the elective Chapter of Rome, Master of the Order of Preachers.

Has he been a Magister Ordinis who sweeps a third of the Dominican stars with his tail? Hardly. His clear identity throughout his nine years as Master, and certainly the dominant tone of his letters, is that of a brother. He has exercised his authority and expression not by macho demands, but by lived experience, by study and reflection on the life of the Order, past, present, future. He does this in the light of St. Dominic's charism, as he said in his letter on Evangelization to the Chapter of Quezon City, "What lies before us at this time is a challenge to become what St. Dominic had begun: a family joined in unity of life and complementarity of service to the Church and to the world."

The general manner of Fr. Damian Byrne's letters to the Order, while mild and not without a measure of Irish pensiveness, are straightforward, direct. His interested composure balances his relaxed yet head-on approach to the details of Dominican life. He projects a keen sensitivity to the individual and collective needs and exigencies of the entire Order.

Further, his letters evidence a thorough study and personal grasp of the Acts of General Chapters, past and present. He recalls quite frequently those of the Avila Chapter, of Bogota, Oakland, River Forest, Rome, Walderberg, Quezon City. These are like a revolving table that continually returns to the reader's attention. References are also made to the Primitive Constitutions, and, of course, to LCO. All this is like a kind of university learning-ground where he pockets away the necessary tools to assist the Order in the implementation of our decisions on preaching, Dominican life in common, collaboration, the four priorities, the frontiers, formation, evangelization, prayer and reflection. When it comes to study, he pulls the anchor up and rolls out to sea as stress and measure are applied to theological and philosophical study, as well as the study of the problems of our time.

In his letters to the Order, Fr. Byrne rivets to the ecclesial just as fast-firm as Dominic. The very foundation stones of these letters are based on the teachings of Vatican II and post-conciliar documents. The magnificent statement on the mission of the Order, the oxygen and life of the entire notion of frontiers, the very breath and wind of the letter on evangelization is the result of the same "open window" that ushered in "Lumen Gentium" and "Gaudium et Spes." Fr. Byrne's going with the flow of the Church has rhyme and reason: "St. Dominic created the Dominican Family, not for itself, but to be at the service of the Church in its mission to the world."

We would expect a Damian Byrne, O. P., to employ the term "mission to the world." His own personal key that unlocks the door to the missionary work of the Order can only be Paul VI's apostolic exhortation, "Evangelii Nuntiandi." His contemplation is closeted here, and he shares the fruit of this prayer in every letter. Yet his attitude is not confined to me and mine. "Mission on the frontiers," he writes, "calls from us an attitude of deep compassion for people, especially those on the fringes of the human community."

His written statement on our Dominican common life is presented in the light of all that has been traditionally understood, but examined also under the insights of Vatican II and the statements of our recent General Chapters. Structures need to be consistent with the structures of the Church. Our prayer, faith sharing, study, fraternal correction, vows, decision-making, and community building receive thorough-going and creative treatment.

Our brother, Damian Byrne, views obedience in terms of listening to each other in community. He knows the truth of his sharing here. He himself has listened. As we have seen, he has listened to the voices of the past, of the Order, of the Church. He listens to the contemporary voices: Fernandez, Congar, de Couesnongle, you and me. Yet his vision of obedience extends beyond the individual one-on-one response. "We must have the strength to accept the obedience which decision-making imposes on us."

Two complementary letters, "The Challenge of Evangelization Today," and "The Ministry of Preaching," have particular impact since they address the very core of our purpose and calling. We are reminded of Dominic's three-fold method of evangelization. He preached in poverty on the apostolic mode. His method was itinerancy, apostolic mobility. He put himself under the obedience of the Church. Fr. Byrne quotes Paul VI: "The Dominican Order would undoubtedly sin against itself if it turned away from this missionary duty." He further cites William of Montferrat, who stated, "Dominic was filled with a greater zeal for the salvation of all than anyone else I have

ever met."

In addition to searching for new methods of evangelization, we must also be keenly aware of inculturation. "Wherever Christianity exists it is incarnate in a culture." Fr. Byrne announces the need for an international approach to the work of evangelization. As is typical, he places our effort of inculturation in its proper setting in that it is an "ecclesial search."

We are designated and branded preachers. "St. Dominic wanted his Order to be called Preachers. This is the title he chose for himself and his companions, the title granted by the Church. It determined not only his mission but his entire way of life. While many are called to preach, there is a need for an Order of Preachers to remind the Church of its preaching mission." Fr. Byrne states the above while acknowledging that our preaching is first delivered through the witness of our lives. He insists that every member of the Order participates in this preaching mission. "It is precisely here, through the witness of their lives, that our contemplative sisters are at the heart of our preaching family."

The credible witness of every Dominican comes from reading, pondering and living the word of Scripture. It is primarily the witness of Jesus we seek to assume and preach. Further, this proclamation must be prophetic and doctrinal. And while Fr. Byrne emphasizes "word and sacrament" with regard to preaching in a liturgical context, he restates the role of Dominican women in the foremost charism of the Order: "I urge Dominican sisters, both active and cloistered, to take advantage of every opportunity to preach which is open to them and in accordance with the circumstances of their lives."

Damian Byrne, a master preacher, knows what he states when he writes about preaching as our identity, when he gathers up notions of hope from the Gospel. "Our job is to proclaim the hope of the Gospel more frequently and preach to the limit of our vision even though we do not fully embody that vision. Like Dominic we are not prophets of doom or misfortune. Like Jesus, he did not announce bad news. He announced good news. He was a prophet of hope."

Our brother Damian penned a marvelous document on collaboration in the Dominican Family: "In Collaboration Together." This letter was written originally as an address to Dominican women superiors as they gathered in Rome, May 17, 1991. The absolute sincerity of the sentiments of this work is testified by so many letters prior to this one, encouraging collaboration among the members of the Order. When he writes on preaching, evangelization, formation, you name it, he unfailingly promotes collaboration.

Fr. Byrne knows how to strike at the core of his topic. In this letter on collaboration, he states, "I believe that it is only when we accept each other as equals that we can collaborate effectively together in ministry. This is the only basis for collaboration." Joint efforts are proposed in ministry of the word, in retreats, formation, promoting vocations, and in works such as justice and peace. And what does it take? Here's his formula: adaptation, acceptance, time, recognition of a different approach, respect for one another's space, rhythm and implementation. He wisely finishes this list off with: "Beware of competition."

Formation, like collaboration, enters into almost every one of Fr. Byrne's letters in one form or another. Culled and stacked together and placed with the two major letters on the subject, they would reveal a thorough study. And while invited to focus on the new members in their formation, we are reminded that for every Dominican, formation is a life-long process. Those who enter should be assisted toward the development of independence, decision-making, and normal relationships. Their foundation must be human, religious, intellectual and pastoral. The Dominican community, he says, should stand as a "Sancta Praedicatio" for those in formation, so that they may see the link between our study and our preaching.

Fr. Byrne's vision for the future is mapped out well in his letter on study. We are reminded that study was emphasized throughout the Primitive Constitutions, and even to this day it forms the preacher for the work of salvation. As St. Thomas picked up his intellectual tools to weed out and cultivate, so are we to uphold and pursue the theology of the goodness of creation and reject dualism. The soil for study is nourished by encouragement, atmosphere, a rhythm of life, personal devotion, discipline, dedication, personal endeavour, perseverance, application, investigation, critical reflection, and the greatest of these, says Byrne, is critical reflection. He indicates that critical reflection and theological reflection are close kin cousins. Those engaged in this discipline and prayer may admit they merge into one.

Fr. Damian quotes Gilbert of Tournai, "We will never discover the truth if we are content with what we have discovered. The writers who went before us are not our masters but our guides." Fr. Damian Byrne guides us ever forward. We are not to grapple with the problems of the past that have been proved, but with the problems of the present that need investigation under the light of the Gospel. We stand atop the mountain with this man who sees its other side. All that our Brother, Damian Byrne, has written is full of truth. With him we follow the truth, the message of the Gospel, into the future.

NOTES

1. I.D.I., #259

2. I.D.I., #289

3. I.D.I., #238

4. I.D.I., #262

5. I.D.I., #259

6. *ibid.*

7. *ibid.*

8. I.D.I., #269

9. *ibid.*

10. *ibid.*

11. I.D.I., #269

12. I.D.I., #298

13. *ibid.*

14. I.D.I., #296

15. I.D.I., #130

16. *ibid.*

JOURNEY TO INTIMACY

Sr. Mary of the Sacred Heart, O.P.
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The spiritual journey to intimacy with God begins with a divine attraction inviting us to new horizons. Our guide leads us beyond familiar and comfortable plains up a high mountain where he nourishes us with the food of the Word for our journey. It is an adventuresome journey of trust and dependence not without cost but yielding a priceless relationship.

Every journey has a point of departure. In order to move ahead one must leave something or someone behind. Every newly married couple in a sense must leave behind father and mother and move on to a new life with his/her spouse.

Relationships begin when two individuals meet or are introduced. In the divine romance God is the one taking the initiative. He appeared to Moses in a burning bush that was not consumed by fire and in so doing captured his attention. Moses approached, being drawn by something beyond his comprehension. He left the sheep and sought the Shepherd of Israel. He began a journey from "knowing about" God, to "knowing" him and ultimately speaking to him as friend to friend.

In his gospel St. Matthew portrays Jesus as a new Moses on a new mountain, giving a new law. And yet Jesus, the Word made Flesh, is far greater than Moses. The Israelites, being struck with fear, could not draw near to God. On the contrary, the Son of God, like a divine magnet, instills men and women with trust and confidence and draws them up the Mount of Beatitudes.

The first to be called and drawn were Peter and Andrew as they were casting a net into the sea. That *Δεῖτε ὀπίσω μου* : "Come on behind me..." (Mt. 4:19) was so irresistible that immediately leaving their nets, they followed him. That moment in time in which they heard the voice of the Word calling them became their departure point. They embarked on their journey to intimacy instantly, without provisions, and leaving behind all that they had hitherto depended upon. This "casting off" of the familiar for the "yet to be" was the beginning of their transformation from fishermen to disciples, from professionals to students. From the experience of this encounter their lives would never be the same.

So, too, for James and John, who not only left their nets but also "abandoned ship" and father. The call to intimacy demands an immediate, wholehearted response at all costs.

The word for "follow", *ἀκολουθέω*, means not only to follow but to follow as a disciple, to imitate. They followed Jesus, the Way of Life, who would teach them a new way of living.

Moses went up Mt. Horeb to receive the law from God that he in turn might give it to the Israelites. Jesus leads his disciples up the Mount of Beatitudes and teaches them with authority. Jesus goes beyond the Mosaic code and takes us straight to God.

Atop the Mount of Beatitudes between heaven and earth, at the heart of the Sermon on the Mount we find Jesus teaching his disciples about prayer. What is prayer? For Adam it was enjoying God's presence while walking with him in the garden of Eden in the cool of the evening; it was listening to God and speaking to him. For the psalmist it was crying out to God with mind, heart and emotions. We are "hard put" to find a definition of prayer in the scriptures but the scriptures are filled with people praying to God. It is almost as natural as breathing.

God's utterance of "The Ten Words"¹, the Ten Commandments, in the Old Testament were for the most part prohibitions: "You shall not..." It is interesting to note that Jesus' instruction on prayer begins with a plural future of prohibition, *οὐκ ἔσεσθε*: "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites" (Mt. 6:5).

Three times a day, at 9 A.M., noon and 3 P.M., the Jew would daily say the Shemoneh 'esreh, the "Eighteen" prayers, wherever he happened to be. Thus one could arrange to be on the street corner or top step of the synagogue, etc., while standing with hands stretched out, palms upward and head bowed.² It was easy for the hypocrites to be seen as they made a display of prayer. And indeed Jesus tells us their purpose was that they might be seen by men. Their prayer could hardly be called prayer. "When a man begins to think more of how he is praying than of what he is praying, his prayer dies upon his lips."³ Jesus using the present tense, a progressive of description here, tells us that the hypocrites with their commercial mentality "are receiving their reward" (Mt. 6:5). It is as a receipt, "Paid in full!"⁴

Jesus, being practical and constructive, speaks in the singular as he addresses each one of his disciples. His use of the singular personal pronoun *σὺ*, you, and its placement at the very beginning of the sentence give it emphasis and make it clear that he is speaking to each one personally and to all. "But when YOU pray, go into your room and having closed your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret (place)..." (Mt. 6:6).

Here we have the seed of true prayer planted in the heart. Basically, Jesus is saying : Go into your bedroom, where no one will see or disturb you. There pray to your (singular pronoun) Father, who is in heaven and your (singular) Father, who sees in secret will reward you. We see here a relationship: father and child. This personal relationship and dialogue is itself a reward.⁵

This particular verse in the Greek can be translated in various ways due to the use of the article τὸν as a relative pronoun with an elliptical verb and the substantival use of the adjective κρυπτός with its article as a demonstrative pronoun: "...and pray to your Father, who (is) in that secret (place)..." (Mt. 6:6).

"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (RSV).

"But when you pray, go to your private room and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place, and your Father who sees all that is done in secret will reward you" (JB).

"But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly" (KJV).

"But when you pray, go into your own room, shut your door and pray to your father privately. Your Father who sees all private things will reward you" (Phillips Modern English).

"But when you pray, go away by yourself, all alone, and shut the door behind you and pray to your Father secretly, and your Father, who knows your secrets will reward you" (Living Bible). ⁶

Of the translations examined, I found the Revised Standard Version to be the best translation and the Jerusalem Bible close behind. The King James Version has tried to express the emphatic YOU at the beginning by making it vocative and has added "openly" at the end of the verse, which is clearly not in the Greek. The Phillips Modern English is poor in translating κρυπτός as an adverb and again as accusative rather than locative. The Living Bible is a very poor translation if it can even be called such.

After instructing the disciples where to pray, Jesus then teaches them how not to pray. Here we find the main verb μή βατταλογήσητε in the second person plural aorist subjunctive with the negative and translated as "don't ever babble..." (Mt. 6:7). These Gentiles imagine they will be heard by means of their much speaking or wordiness. Again using the aorist subjunctive of prohibition, Jesus continues: "Don't ever become like them..." (Mt. 6:8). Of the six versions I examined, none clearly conveys the idea of a prohibition of an action not yet begun. The Living Bible totally omitted the phrase!

The "magical" prayer of the babblers is an imaginary

attempt to manipulate gods, who are not.⁷ Jesus puts prayer on a Father - child relationship. "Your (plural) Father knows what you need before you ask him" (Mt. 6:8).

At the summit of the Mount and at the heart of the sermon, Jesus, our Lawgiver, leads us beyond the mountain to heaven itself as he instructs us how to pray.⁸ By calling God "Father" we find ourselves in a relationship with him. By calling him "Our Father," our relationship reaches not only upward, but establishes us as brothers and sisters with the privileges and responsibilities of family members.

The Lord's Prayer is so familiar to us Christians that we can say it routinely with our lips without realizing what we are saying. Studying the Greek text can make it come alive and give us a greater appreciation of what we are actually saying.

The first three petitions are prayers for the glory of God and all three begin with an aorist imperative verb. Since it is an imperative of request or entreaty, i.e., of a subordinate to a superior, child to father, it is fitting that "please" be used in the translation because it most effectively conveys the meaning. "Please let your name be revered" (Mt. 6:9) or "treated as holy" conveys a respectful petition full of desire. Something is lost when "please" is omitted. "May your name be hallowed" (Mt. 6:9) has a wishful tone and is weak in expressing a strong personal desire. For the Semitic the "name" was synonymous for the person.⁹ St. Cyprian says: "It is not that we think to make God holy by our prayer; rather we are asking God that his name may be made holy in us. Indeed, how could God be made holy, he who is the source of holiness?"¹⁰ John Meier points out that this is a theological passive.¹¹ God is the agent. We are asking God to enable us to give him the reverence he deserves and demands as our heavenly Father.

"Please let your kingdom come; please let your will be done" (Mt. 6:10) is a parallelism. It was used by the Hebrews to say the same thing in two ways.¹² Luke does not have this repetition or added explanation, while Matthew "explains that the kingdom means the will of God on earth".¹³ God's kingdom is a society upon earth where God's will is as perfectly done as it is in heaven. "The Kingdom demands the submission of my will, my heart, my life. It is only when each one of us makes his personal decision and submission that the kingdom comes... (We) pray that we may submit our wills entirely to the will of God."¹⁴

Our journey to intimacy will take us down the Mount of Beatitudes to the Garden of Gethsemani. Here Jesus' prayer ends with a conditional. "If this (cup) cannot pass unless I drink it, please let your will be done" (Mt. 26:42). This last clause is exactly as it is in the Our Father: words, their order, tense and even accent marks. Clearly Jesus' prayer is

not simply one of resignation but an imperative entreaty made in love and trust, sure of God's love and wisdom.

Let us turn now to the petition for forgiveness, which Jesus reinforces at the end of the prayer itself. Like the aforementioned petitions, the verb, aorist imperative of entreaty, holds prominence at the beginning of the sentence; however, it is second person rather than third. "Please forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Mt. 6:12). In praying thus we give God a comparative measuring stick as it were in the word ὡς : "as we also have forgiven..." (Mt. 6:12).

Here "our discipleship is put to the test again and again, and endless forgiving does not come easy"¹⁵ Jesus, himself, leads the way and preaches by example from the pulpit of the cross. Luke gives us Jesus' first words from the cross, using aorist imperative of entreaty: "Father, please forgive them..." (Lk. 23:34). He uses the imperfect tense (ἐλεγεῖν) showing continued or repeated action. Thus we translate: "Jesus kept saying: 'Father, please forgive them...'" (Lk. 23:34).

"To be forgiven we must forgive, and that is a condition of forgiveness which only the power of Christ can enable us to fulfill."¹⁶ "We have a responsibility to imitate God, to follow his lead in forgiving."¹⁷

Speaking of forgiveness and it being a prerogative of God, Gregory of Nyssa concludes: "If therefore a man imitates in his own life the characteristics of the Divine Nature, he becomes somehow that which he visibly imitates."¹⁸ Is that not where the journey to intimacy leads? Transformation into Christ or as the mystic would say: to become "another Himself"! For that brings us full circle in the journey to intimacy. Jesus, who came forth from the Father, catches us in the divine embrace and takes us with and in him to the Father through the Spirit. "To fall in love with God is the greatest of all romances, to seek him the greatest adventure and to find him the greatest human achievement."¹⁹

ENDNOTES

1. Alexander Jones, God's Living Word (Glen Rock: Paulist Press, 1965), 18.
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3. loc. cit.
4. John P. Meier, Matthew (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1980), 58.

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8. Hilda C. Graef, St. Gregory of Nyssa (New York: Newman Press, 1954), 35.
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12. Barclay, 211.
13. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, eds., The New Jerome Biblical Commentary. (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 645.
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18. Graef, 71.
19. St. Augustine

MY EYES ARE EVER TOWARDS THE LORD

A look at the expression of the vows
according to Blessed Jordan of Saxony

Sr. Mary Catharine of Jesus
Summit

"From the day when you proposed in your mind to seek and search out how you should leave wholly behind you not only your own kinsfolk and possessions but even your own self you became most lovable to the Lord" (Vann 152).

The words are those of Bl. Jordan of Saxony, second Master of the Dominican Order. Although written sometime near the beginning of the thirteenth century, they carry a movement of joy and an ageless spirit which make them as applicable to us as to the Benedictine nun they were originally addressed to by Jordan.

Jordan's unique spirit, a spirit of joy thrusting upwards to God, has seized the minds and hearts of Dominicans for generations--but especially of the Nuns of the Order.

What is it that makes Jordan so timeless, so attractive? Why is it that his message is as relevant now as it was almost 800 years ago?

Perhaps more than anyone else, Jordan captured the kernel, the heart of the evangelical counsels, allowing them to give life, to foster a living spirit of love. By not getting bogged down by externals but living always with a motive of love, Jordan's leitmotif, "My eyes are ever towards the Lord" (Ps 25), inspired him as a true son of St. Dominic to share this with others. Fortunately for us, Jordan's ideals and love for evangelical life have been kept alive through his many letters.

Surprisingly, Jordan writes very little on the vows themselves. Once one realizes, however, that "the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience were not systematized, theologically and canonically, until around the end of the twelfth century" (Laurentin 42), it is clear that for Jordan these vows were only the beginning, the springboard. What is important is being imbued with their spirit and growing in Love through them. It is the goal, that of "turning towards the Lord", that is of ultimate importance.

Obedience--The Sign of Unity

In the approximately fifty-six extant letters of Bl. Jordan only one reference is made to the vow of obedience itself. One gets the idea that obedience was not the stumbling block for them as it is for us. One must also remember that the social system of Jordan's time was such that almost everyone was part of the feudal system--that of lord and serf, and of lord and vassal.

The custom of lord and serf was almost that of slavery. One was born into serfdom, and a serf and his children were bound to the land and service to the lord. It is interesting that until the latter part of the middle ages the lord lived, worked and ate with his serfs (perhaps where we got the idea of first among equals?) mitigating to a great extent his autocratic power.

But the most distinctive form of medieval lordship was that of feudalism (from the Latin, feudum meaning fief). In exchange for a grant of land or for services a man would place himself under the lord's protection as his "man" or vassal. This in turn created what was called a feudal bond characterized by several symbolic acts.

The first of these was homage, the process by which the man knelt and placed his hands between those of his lord, so putting himself at the lord's disposal and under his protection. (Encyclopedia Britannica 18:713).

The other two external acts were the oath of fealty, and the investiture by which the lord handed over some token of the fief to his new "man". Only by knowing the milieu, the customs of Dominic and Jordan's times can we understand why Jordan wrote in describing obedience:

"Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord--the joy of that Lord to whom in particular you have sworn fealty, the Order of Preachers" (Vann 80).

For Jordan this exhortation was not merely poetic license but a reflection of the reality of his times. In entering the Order, a person placed herself at its service, establishing a very personal bond with the Order as the way of accepting the authority of the superior.

This in turn explains how the "oath of fealty" differed from the other Orders of the time, namely the Benedictines. It did resemble that of Cluny but with one major difference: while the monks of Cluny and its daughterhouses made their profession to the Abbot of Cluny only and not to his delegates, (they were very particular about this), Jordan was concerned only that the profession be made (Mandonnet 303).

Those sisters who ought to have taken their vows by now may safely do so in the hands of the Prioress or of the Prior of our convent there or one of the Provincials acting in my name; and this will give me as much joy as if they were making their profession in my own hands, nor must they ever feel any misgivings about this procedure (Vann 110).

Also intimately tied in with obedience was the now famous trademark of Dominican law--that of dispensation. This was highly valued by Jordan and he had very strong words about it to the Prior-provincial, Br. Stephen, who had questioned a decision of the preceeding General Chapter:

As for other matters: if anyone supposes that I have not the power of dispensation with regard to the Order's regulations, that seems to be the same as saying that the office of Master General was never committed to me. Nothing in the constitutions, however grave, is to be regarded as being beyond my power to dispense with if I think fit to do so in view of special needs of times, places and persons, except for the three laws which, at the last Chapter of Paris (1228), were so firmly established as not to allow of either revocation or dispensation....(144).

This letter more than any of the others shows not only his brilliance and capabilities but also his great humility. He had no confusion about what was expected of him or of how he should carry out the office of Master General.

Poverty -- The Expression

For Jordan, poverty was the foundation and expression of both an interior and exterior living of the evangelical counsels. As is well known, in the beginnings of the Order poverty was the unique mark of the friar causing the Franciscans and Dominicans to disagree on the extent and manner of its expression. For the Franciscan poverty was the ideal, but for the Dominican poverty was only one of the means towards the goal--contemplation and the salvation of souls.

For Jordan, while exterior poverty was not only necessary but also something to strive for, it was the interior poverty of spirit that he was most concerned about:

But what am I saying? Is it really poverty that you have chosen? Rather it is poverty that you have thrown aside and riches you have chosen; for the poverty of Christ is willed poverty, that poverty of spirit which gives you the kingdom of heaven (70).

And in this same letter to Diana, Jordan goes on to link the ideal of poverty not with "the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Mt 8:20 RSV), but with "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"(Jn 15:13). It is the poverty of this self-emptying that becomes perfect love and Jordan with all the charm of his times calls this love "flawless gold" (70).

Poverty was not simply the renunciation of goods. It was deeper than that: it was a way of life. This was particularly to be expressed in the poverty of community life lived in unity in the Lord.

The thought of you all rejoices my heart, beloved daughters, since I know how eagerly, in unity together, you walk with the Lord, seeking nothing save Him in whom alone is your sufficiency and without whom all possessions must be not wealth but penury. And Him you possess more completely, the more completely you give yourselves to Him, withdrawing yourselves in body and mind alike from this present world so as to belong to your Bridegroom alone....(106).

One cannot but be attracted and filled with enthusiasm at Jordan's joyous embracing of this poverty filled with Christ's love. "Poverty, humility, love are words for him which mean, even on earth, richness and joy and fullness of life" (44). Joy in Christ was the continuous theme in Jordan's life.

Chastity -- The Undivided Heart

He calls Diana his daughter in loving awe of the Father, his sister by adoption in the Son, his beloved in the love of the Holy Spirit and his companion in the religious life. Even with our twentieth century mentality it is enough to warrant a second look and the raising of a few eyebrows. These terms of affection startle us; it does not fit in with our expectations of "holy" people, especially priests and nuns in the thirteenth century.

But for all our apprehensions, Jordan and Diana's relationship, a relationship in which each is constantly urged closer to God, warms our hearts. "This is how it should be", we think.

"There is another word that I send you, small and brief: my love, which will speak for me to your love in your heart and will content it. May this word too be yours, and likewise dwell with you forever" (112).

After years of chastity meaning rigidity, coldness and the lack of affection, it is encouraging to discover its original meaning in the early days of the Order.

It is in regard to chastity more than any of the other vows that Jordan's eyes are ever towards the Lord. As with the other two counsels, Jordan expresses concern that it be total and interior and that there be moderation in the ascetical practices connected with chastity:

For, as I have often warned you, bodily exercise is profitable to little, and in vigils and fastings and tears the due measure is easily exceeded; but virtue-humility and patience, kindness and obedience, charity also and sobriety- can never grow to excess (103).

And in yet another letter:

"For as I have often warned you and shall warn you again: in vigils, in fasting, in tears too, it is easy to fall into excess; but virtue can never grow to excess" (116).

True to the developing Dominican charism, Jordan's concern was not so much that faults be rooted out but that the nuns grow in virtue.

Repeatedly, Jordan reminds Diana and her community whom they love and by whom they are possessed. Christ is always their Bridegroom.

"You have contemned the kingdom of this world and all its pomps for the love of Jesus Christ your beloved Bridegroom" (70).

"Let the loving thought of your Bridegroom be constantly in your minds; let there be purity of heart " (73).

Contrary to the ideas of the Catharists, Jordan insisted that there also be reverence and respect for the body precisely because it was the temple of the Holy Spirit (thus the need for moderation).

"The temple of God is holy, and you are that temple; nor is there any doubt but that the Lord is in His holy temple, dwelling within you" (79).

And finally there is also the now famous solicitous concern for Diana's injured foot:

"Your poor foot, which I hear you have hurt, hurts me too; and makes me the more anxious that you should take more care not only of your foot but of your whole body" (135).

But while Jordan repeatedly pointed out the goal to the nuns--that of union with God--in his practical way he also knew that there would be times of loneliness and even discouragement:

"Find comfort in the only begotten Son of God, your Bridegroom, in whose presence we shall again see our friends, and in whom and before whom we shall rejoice, as they that rejoice in the harvest" (89).

And again:

"Be confident and gay; and what is lacking to you because I cannot be with you, make up for in the company of a better friend, your Bridegroom Jesus Christ whom you may have more constantly with you in spirit and truth" (109).

Conclusion

I hope in a small way I have been able to share with you what I think were Jordan's ideas on evangelical life. In ending I close with words that I think he would say to us if he lived today:

"Again I say to you: do not be afraid; I will be to you a father, and you shall be to me a daughter and the bride of Christ Jesus" (69).

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SOUL RISES UP
RESTLESS WITH
TREMENDOUS
DESIRE FOR
GOD'S
honor and the
salvation of souls.

SHE SEEKS TO PURSUE TRUTH AND CLOTHE
HERSELF IN IT.

BUT THERE IS NO WAY SHE CAN SO SAVOR
AND BE ENLIGHTENED BY THIS TRUTH AS
IN CONTINUAL HUMBLE PRAYER, GROUNDED
IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF HERSELF AND OF

GOD.

ST. CATHERINE OF SIENA

A NEVER FADING VISION

Sister Mary Emmanuel, O.P.
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Out of the 1992 General Assembly of the Dominican Nuns a whole new web of relationships and experiences will be formed. The theme chosen, "Reclaiming the Dominican Vision for the Twenty-first Century," makes us reflect upon the roots of our communities. Each community's story tells its faith-journey.

From what we know of contemplative communities, one can readily say that one common and vibrant incentive in attaining holiness was, and is, devotion to Saint Joseph, the foster-father of Jesus. Saint Joseph is acknowledged as the protector of the universal Church, guardian of virgins, patron of Christian families and patron of the interior life. As early as the seventeenth century, Saint Joseph was honored in the liturgy of the Church. In later centuries, the Church began to give more notice to him whom the Gospels call "a just man,"¹ and the faithful found solace in paying him the homage due to him.

We read in the Gospel how Saint Joseph fulfilled his task as God's trusted steward. His entrance into the plan of salvation was indirect, yet still of great importance. Though aware that he was the head of the household, yet he served Mary and the boy Jesus. By God's direct choice, he was the protector and witness of the virginal motherhood of Mary, the child's legal father, and the head of the Holy Family. The name the child would bear was first entrusted to Joseph. It was his privileged duty to assist in the education of Jesus, Wisdom Incarnate. When the message of the Incarnation was given to Joseph in the command to "take Mary as your wife, for that which is to be born of her is of the Holy Spirit,"² he embraced the duties of fatherhood with peace and gentleness. The choice of Joseph as father fulfilled the prophecy that the Messiah would be of the royal lineage of David. Through this text we see that Saint Joseph is drawn into the divine plan and history of salvation. His role is unique and divinely appointed.

In their little village of Nazareth, Joseph and Jesus attended a Friday evening service composed of blessings and prayers which introduced the faithful into the sacred world of the Sabbath. On the platform in that village synagogue stands an adult and a child. The child repeats "in a treble voice some ritual chants intoned by the adult who seems to be his teacher, submitting him to a kind of test. The teacher, using a pointer, guides the child in reading the inspired lines

written on the scroll. The boy frames his chanting of the Sabbatical lessons with ritual blessings, and he practices the reading of the Law."³ This same procedure is repeated every Friday for a child who is preparing himself for BAR-MITZVAH. The "teacher may be the rabbi or the synagogue cantor. In this particular case, the teacher may even be Joseph, the father of the neophyte Jesus."⁴

By our vocation we are being called to be guardians of a holy, precious gift: God's grace in us and about us. Like Saint Joseph, our Constitutions stand beside us as our teacher and guide, instructing us that "to persevere faithfully and courageously in continence, the nuns cultivate close communion with God through intimate friendship with Christ in all the circumstances of life. They should nourish this with the Sacred Scriptures and the Eucharist, and strengthen it by loving devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God."⁵

Saint Joseph, director, friend and protector of souls who aim at perfection, pray for us.⁶

Joseph and Mary, as the Gospels relate, were people of little means, but they were filled with Jewish spirituality. Being a devout man, Saint Joseph found in the Law and word of God something reliable. For him the service of God was not a matter of pious feelings, but a matter of faithfulness in the service of God. Every Sabbath, in their village of Nazareth, Jesus accompanied Joseph to the synagogue. Jesus watched as Joseph donned his prayer shawl and whispered the prayer of sanctification. Then Joseph uncovered his head, laid the shawl over his shoulders, and "said the first blessing which marks his participation in the Saturday morning service. As Jesus watched Joseph carry out these traditional gestures, speaking words directly inspired by God, he realized that the humble village carpenter is exercising his priestly dignity."⁷ What an awe-inspiring sight! It is a crucial moment; Jesus has entered into the timeless realm of prayer. The Gospels also relate for us that it was Joseph's custom to go "to Jerusalem every year for the Passover festival,"⁸ showing us what was the most important element in his life. In silence and loyalty he served the God of the Covenant.

Saint Teresa of Avila often said that she had never asked a favor from Saint Joseph without obtaining it. And she exhorted her Carmelite daughters to ask the gift of prayer from him, who had been so familiar with Jesus and Mary. After the example of the Saints, "our whole life is harmoniously ordered to preserving the continual remembrance of God. By the celebration of Eucharist and the Divine Office, by reading and meditation on the Sacred Scriptures, by private prayer, vigils and intercessions we strive to have the same mind as

Christ Jesus. In silence and stillness we earnestly seek the face of the Lord and never cease earnestly seek the face of the Lord and never cease making intercession with the God of our salvation that all men and women might be saved."⁹

Saint Joseph, whose life was one perpetual prayer and contemplation, pray for us.¹⁰

In the Litany of the Saints, Saint Joseph's name is invoked after that of Saint John the Baptist and even before the names of the Apostles and Patriarchs. The patron of workers is not Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life,, but his foster-father Saint Joseph. Our Redeemer is the son of a carpenter. By divine decree Joseph was given custody of the living bread from heaven. He was so attuned to God in his mind that he perceived the message of the angel even in his sleep. Saint Joseph sought always to do the Father's will. This is where true Christian glory lies. And in this way did the carpenter of Nazareth contribute to the establishment of the reign of God, of which Jesus, the carpenter's Son, was the founder and King. The Holy Family, that first religious community, was united in justice, peace and love; each doing from the heart the Father's will and content and happy to serve God in this way. Modelling our lives on this first holy community, we likewise become a leaven "to reconcile all things in Christ."¹¹ Our Constitutions assure us that, "since obedience binds us to Christ and the Church, the labor and renunciation which it entails continue Christ's self-offering and take on the character of sacrifice both for ourselves and for the Church, in whose fulfillment the whole work of creation is being accomplished."¹²

Saint Joseph, perfect model of the interior life, pray for us.¹³

I would like to end this with a quote from a poem written by a Passionist, Father Augustine Paul Hennessy, who used to reside at their monastery in West Springfield. I do not have the complete poem, so an introduction to the setting is appropriate. Father Augustine Paul, C.P., addresses a number of Saints by each one's characteristic gift and then, in just a few short lines, extols the Saint's talented use of this gift in God's service. Of Saint Joseph, Father writes:

Joseph of the tool chest,
have you no pride?
Why, yes! God kissed me
on the lips every night,
when he was just a little child.¹⁴

Notes

1. Mt. 1:19.
2. Mt. 1:20.
3. Robert Aron, The Jewish Jesus (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1971), p. 47.
4. ibid.
5. LCM, #26, S--I, p. 41.
6. Litany of St. Joseph. The original source is not known. It is believed to have been a translation from the French by our foundress, Mother Mary Hyacinth of Jesus Fitzgerald, O.P.
7. Aron, pp. 75-76.
8. Lk. 2:41
9. LCM, #74, S-IV, p. 52.
10. Litany of St. Joseph.
11. 2 Cor. 5:18.
12. LCM, #19, S-II, 38.
13. Litany of St. Joseph.
14. Father Augustine Paul Hennessy, C.P.

GOD WHO REVEALS HIMSELF

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In his Letter of Promulgation of the Proprium for the Dominican Office, Fr. Vincent de Couesnongle refers to the Vatican Council document Dei Verbum, and says that "our faith, as well as our apostolic activity and all our theological study draw us to a full and free adherence to the God who reveals Himself"¹. Therefore, it seems good to ask, "How does God reveal Himself in our Divine Office?"

The first and most obvious revelation is His **Real Presence** in the Blessed Sacrament. Most Religious do not have this privilege of His Bodily Presence exposed for adoration as they pray the Divine Office. As children gathered around their father, or as loyal subjects celebrating with their king, so we have the honor of worshipping "coram Sanctissimo", in the presence of the Most High.

Scripture is the word of God. Jesus is the Word of God. Therefore, when we hear **Scripture** read, it is God revealing Himself. God's word is a love letter which He has addressed to ME personally. In the Liturgy He says to me, "I have something to say to you".² And I should be all ears to hear the message He is graciously giving to me.

But there are many things which get in my way so that I do not hear well. One occupational hazard is that I have heard these words so often that I am too familiar with them: I know them by heart: they no longer catch my attention. I have to learn to listen carefully for a nuance which I have not heard before, or for a new depth of meaning that I missed last month when they were read.

Another problem is that some texts seem so obscure, dull, or obviously aimed at somebody else. "I never did get anything out of that text" is often my excuse for paying little attention. But He is saying it to ME today. He has a message there for ME. I must listen and ask Him to make known in my heart what He is trying to say to me.

Then there is the perennial problem of my wandering mind. Even if I am thinking about the Office in general, I am often thinking about what comes next, or how I will sing or say some other element which is the part assigned to me. This is the same weakness I have when another Sister speaks to me. Instead of listening to her, really listening, I am thinking of what I will say in response. Lord, teach me to be aware of You speaking to me, help me to listen, really LISTEN to You in the Liturgy, and to let this listening attitude overflow into my encounters with my Sisters in Community.

Another way that God reveals Himself in our Liturgy is in the **Community**. He has told us that "Where two or three are gathered in My Name, there I am in the midst of them".³ Certainly, we are gathered in His Name. The Church is the Body of Christ and where the Body is, there the Head is, too. If only I could SEE Him in our midst, it would certainly increase my fervor. But my Faith assures me of His presence and I need to remind myself of it frequently. He is in our midst to pray with us. He will lead us in worship of the

Father. He prays on our behalf and in our stead. When we make a mess of it, He prays. "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing".⁴ His prayer makes up for the lukewarmness of ours.

The prayer of Jesus is a fascinating mystery. "He spent the whole night in prayer to God".⁵ How wonderful it would be to be able to listen in on that loving dialogue of Jesus with His Father. But very likely, being human and needing human words and sentiments to express Himself. He used the words of the psalms which He had learned so well that they sprang to His lips to express any thoughts and emotions that He was experiencing.

Jesus also prayed frequently in the Temple, as did all good Jews. This was a ceremonial Liturgy just as ours is. He knows from experience the feel of human beings worshiping God together as a group. He chanted the Hallel and other psalms with His family, friends and disciples, and listened to the reading of the Prophets. He attended the Morning and Evening sacrifices and the annual celebrations. Liturgy had a big place in His life and He wants to celebrate with us.

It is also in the Community that the Holy Spirit reveals Himself. He is the source of all unity, and so when we blend our voices in praise and petition, it is the Spirit who brings about this oneness in the Lord.

God reveals Himself in the **Sister reading or singing**. He has chosen to use her as an instrument to send me a message. Each of us in our turn as reader or singer can pray, "Lord, make me a channel of Your Word". There are times when I don't care for the channel the Lord has chosen to convey His waters of wisdom in my direction. When He says, "I want to give you a drink of health-giving liqueur from this chalice", I sometimes turn aside with something like, "No, thanks, Lord. I'll find a drink somewhere else". With that I turn off my hearing and run ahead in the Breviary or turn to a more interesting passage.

But whether she is a good reader or singer or a poor one. He is IN her and is using her for the moment to bring His word to me to reveal Himself. Even if she is hard to understand, if she mispronounces words or mumbles, I should still make the effort to listen. Surely I can get something from what she is saying. The very effort I make can open me to hear a new meaning in the few words I do get. The very fact of her mispronouncing a word may be His way of nudging me, calling my attention to that part which holds His message for me today. And if I am really listening and thinking about what she is saying or singing, I will not be so likely to come in too soon and cut off her words before she has quite finished her syllable.

Finally God reveals Himself in **my own person**. I have the privilege of being part of that marvelous prayer of Jesus by joining my voice with His. If only I could hear Him! Then I would make real efforts to blend my voice with His, to keep with Him even when His speed or pitch doesn't seem quite right. I believe that He is in me and I am in Him. He uses my vocal cords to praise His Father. He uses my body to worship with inclinations and gestures.

He uses my mind to probe the meaning of the Scriptures. He uses my emotions to feel the joy, sadness, hope, love, fear, delight, pain and frustration of His people in all times and places. The Angels themselves don't have that privilege. They can sing with Him, but I have Him singing and praying in me.

If I could see and hear You, Lord, I would be less likely to drag my feet in arriving, to make sloppy ceremonies, to be lazy and listless in using my voice to praise you. Strengthen my Faith to make me eager, enthusiastic and fervent in this Opus Dei, this work of God.

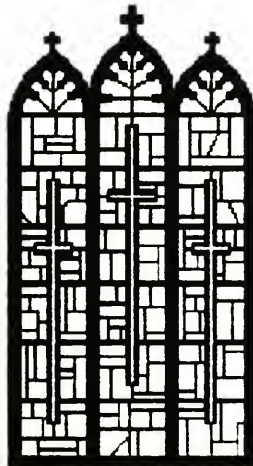
1. Vincent de Couesnongle, O.P. *Supplement to the Liturgy of the Hours for the Order of Preachers* (Chicago:Dominican Liturgical Commission, U.S.A., 1991) p.XIII

2. Luke 7:40

3. Matthew 18:20

4. Luke 23:34

5. Luke 6:12



The following essay is the condensed form of an article originally published in the September, 1991, issue of *Religious Life Review*.

Contemplative Religious Women: The American Situation Twenty-Five years Later

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How have communities of contemplative women in America borne the challenges of renewal since the close of the Second Vatican Council? Have the adaptations initiated by the process of renewal altered the way contemplatives interpret their vocation? Finding answers to these questions presents no small difficulty. The subject proves a complex and delicate area to explore primarily because renewal is an on-going process and opinions vary widely as to what constitutes authentic adaptation and what should be viewed as infidelity to the contemplative ideal. We do possess certain norms, however, that may serve as starting points in examining the ways in which contemplative women understand their role in the Church at present. Among these are the four elements specified in *Perfectae Caritatis* no. 7 as those that should particularly characterize contemplative life: solitude, silence, an attitude of constant prayer and voluntary penance. Within the framework of these four elements, I would like to discuss some of the effects of renewal on contemplative women in contemporary American society.

The responses to a survey conducted in 1988 among the existing federations and conferences of nuns regarding their needs and concerns proved an invaluable source of information while preparing this article.¹ I have tried to integrate the data obtained from this survey with that I researched by means of correspondence with members from among the nearly two hundred communities of contemplative religious women in this country. To safeguard the personal nature of the responses, I have not quoted directly from either the survey or the letters received from nuns, but have relied upon statements drawn from source books, public lecture notes and pamphlets published by the above-mentioned associations to reinforce my comments.

Contemplative Life as Seen by the Council

The opening lines of *Perfectae Caritatis* no.7 present a pattern for renewal of the religious life modeled on that already present in the early Christian Church. In placing special emphasis on solitude (particularly the observance of enclosure in the case of nuns), silence, a spirit readily disposed for prayer and penance the decree bids us return to the spirit which animated the first monks and nuns who sought a spiritual rebirth through the love of God and confrontation with the false self. The Church's vision of renewal centers on the deepening of the individual's relationship with God and stresses for contemplative religious a total and exclusive concentration on Him. Constant prayer, acts of self-sacrifice, solitude and silence all contribute to this spiritual renewal.

Perfectae Caritatis invites contemplative religious to eliminate from their lives what no longer facilitates the fullest realization of their vocation, and to weigh those observances proper to their life according to the principles and criteria specified in the document. In sum, these amount to the following of Christ as illustrated in the Gospel, a return to the spirit of the founder or foundress of the institute, and a more vital participation of religious in the concerns and needs of the whole Church with a more enlightened understanding of social conditions in the modern world. The work of renewal confronting contemplative communities engages these issues. Much of the disagreement over changes in religious practices stems from differing interpretations of these essential criteria.

Enclosure

The interpretation of the observance of enclosure appears to generate the widest diversity of opinion. The members of communities of religious women dedicated to the contemplative life are generally bound by papal enclosure, whose norms the Holy See itself approves and regulates. In addition to the guidelines issued in *PC*, the Congregation for Religious in 1969 published the document *Venite Seorsum*, which provides a detailed program for enclosure in monasteries of nuns. According to the 1988 survey and my own research, one can identify three fundamental attitudes toward enclosure. First, some respondents tend to view the limited interaction with non-community members necessitated by enclosure legislation as an obstacle to the realization of the Christian and contemplative ideal. A second group values a more restricted physical withdrawal, yet maintains a wish to interact openly with non-community members when legitimate opportunities arise. Finally, a third group opts for a strict interpretation of the laws of enclosure, with little or no interaction with those outside their community.

For those religious who share the first of these three views, a sincere and deeply felt need exists to share their experience of God with the men and women who approach their monasteries seeking spiritual direction or requesting prayers for personal intentions. While they understand the need for solitude and withdrawal, the nuns who opt for a broader interpretation of enclosure view whatever contacts they have with non-community members as part of a positive and authentic implementation of the Church's directives. This sentiment finds an echo in two excerpts from a paper delivered at the June, 1989, meeting of Carmelite Communities Associated by one of the participating nuns:

Many women of genuine prayer today are responding to a compelling, inner, spiritual urgency that necessitates, for its fulfillment, a totally different concept of "cloister" or "strict enclosure," with its binding force. The new emphasis on sharing the fruits and riches of the contemplative life more broadly and concretely bases itself far more on the Gospel of Jesus Christ than on Canon Law... The primacy of contemplative prayer in our lives has overflowed in such a way that sisters so attracted can give time to spiritual direction or companioning, occasional talks, meeting with prayer groups...When this is renewing/energizing for the [sister], it is renewing/energizing for the community².

Thus, the nuns in this first group favor a less restricted, more liberal interpretation of enclosure in an attempt to follow Christ's example more closely.

Looking at cloister from a slightly different perspective, those religious who form the second group desire to preserve the structures and practices traditionally associated with papal enclosure, but with modifications. Most of the respondents within this group have chosen to maintain some form of physical separation from visitors and friends without, perhaps, relying on the use of grilles and turns. They believe the occasional use of television, radio and secular newspapers to be an acceptable means of staying informed of current events, as *PC* no. 2d recommends. These nuns only leave the enclosure to obtain medical treatment or to conduct necessary business, although they generally do approve of the attendance of their sisters at meetings aimed at deepening their appreciation of the contemplative vocation.

In contrast to the foregoing interpretations, the nuns who form the third group interpret enclosure in a "strict" manner, with few or no modifications of the traditional practices of their respective orders. These religious display the same joyful spirit in living out the commitment of the enclosure as the respondents in the other two groups, although they limit their interaction with non-community members to an absolute minimum. They present themselves as individuals who enjoy great freedom of heart, whose spiritual embrace encompasses the world insofar as they withdraw from the cares and preoccupations of secular society. An excerpt from a pamphlet published by the Poor Clare Federation of Mary Immaculate articulates this point of view:

Venite Seorsum does not treat only of concepts of withdrawal and the spiritual exodus common to Christianity in any of its lifestyles, but of actually withdrawing into solitude to lead a particular type of life. The instruction asks superiors to bear in mind that the purity and fervor of the cloistered life depends to a great extent on the strict observance of the rules of enclosure"...Cloister is not the dominant note, but the supporting one. It is the very good servant--we would say the indispensable servant--of the canonical contemplative life. For those called to it, cloister is not a burden but a precious gift of God and Church.³

Despite the obvious differences of outlook concerning the observance of enclosure, all respondents fundamentally agree that it does not represent an end in itself. Without exception, the contemplative women whom I contacted believe that they must focus their vocation on union with God. They value enclosure insofar as it serves to deepen their awareness of the Lord's love for them and for all humankind.

Silence

Enclosure and silence are integrally connected in the contemplative life. Withdrawal, in fact, aims at providing an atmosphere that excludes to a great extent the ordinary business and concerns of secular society, making silence and prayerful recollection easier to achieve.

Following the tradition of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, most of the founders and foundresses of the contemplative orders looked upon silence as the guardian of all monastic observance; they taught that the limitation or suppression of speech fosters control of memory and the imagination, thus freeing the mind to dwell on God. All contemplative religious seem to value the observance of silence as an efficacious means of promoting spiritual growth.

As nuns reflected upon the importance of silence in their life, however, they realized that control of the spoken word does not automatically or necessarily lead to interior silence. For example, without suitable spiritual formation and some insight into the dynamics of human psychology, those who lead a life of rigorous exterior silence have occasionally found themselves repressing or denying emotions that might find normal expression in properly regulated speech. Not a few contemplative religious thus comment on the need to maintain a balance between silence and speaking. As one nun points out,

Silence...is not a negative element or the mere absence of words and sounds. Speech, in itself, is a positive value intended by the Creator as a vehicle of authentic human communication expressive of charity, unity, truth and the fostering of the noble quality and purpose of human life...But our experience tells us that speech has been abused and has become a source of falsehood, division and strife. This misuse requires a penitential effort to restore it to its intended purpose. By the practice of silence we learn to use speech for the sake of truth and love, not for the sake of self-assertion, ambition or exploitation.⁴

Yet finding the balance between silence and speech proves difficult. Beyond the talking required by the ordinary flow of community life, the post-conciliar years provided many opportunities for contemplative women to speak as they came together at meetings to discuss the renewal of their life according to the Council's requirements. The up-dating of constitutions and directories necessitated regularly-held chapter discussions within most monasteries. Lectures and classes on theological and scriptural topics became more frequent, and most contemplative communities of women permitted the introduction of conversations among the nuns as a means of promoting their spiritual and psychological development.

Confronted with more occasions to speak at present than in the past, a number of nuns indicate that the individual herself must assume more responsibility for the observance of silence. Legislation can be and often is invoked to safeguard exterior silence, but these religious believe they can best meet the challenges imposed by renewal by means of mature judgment and self-discernment. Accordingly, each nun should assume greater responsibility to safeguard the spirit of recollection within her monastery and her own soul. Most contemplative religious appear to welcome the emphasis placed on personal responsibility concerning the observance of silence as a healthy shift in outlook from an attitude often characterized by a rather narrow and rigid legalism. In the Christian life, interior liberty should mark an individual's growth toward union with God; as His love supplants fear, the need for religious formalism declines.

A Spirit Readily Disposed for Penance

The importance of asceticism in the contemplative life cannot be understood outside the context of Christ's own example: those who aspire to follow Him more closely must be prepared to lose their lives in order to find life in the Lord. The Council stressed the need for religious to reflect upon the role of penance in their life in light of the Gospel's call to conversion and purity of heart, urging them to eliminate those forms of penance judged unsuitable or harmful to their physical or psychological health.

There seems to be little disagreement among contemplatives concerning the need for asceticism in their life, but opinions differ regarding the manner in which they should carry out penitential practices. The nuns with whom I corresponded repeatedly commented on the fact that before the recent changes ushered in by the Council, external penances were incorporated into their daily life without individual, personal need or capacity being sufficiently taken into consideration. Such indiscriminately applied practices often led to a negative understanding or even a rejection of the intrinsic worth and dignity of the human body. The delicate interconnection between body and soul in the growth of the whole human person toward God was at times overlooked or even denied.

In seeking to revitalize the contemplative life through the practice of asceticism, most communities favor the unspectacular, hidden forms of penance, those that promote self-discipline and the spirit of self-donation for the common good and check the desire to control or judge others. Traditional monastic penances thus continue to hold an important place: fasting and abstaining from meat or other types of food, night-rising for prayer, wearing the monastic habit and generously living out the common life according to the approved customs of the particular monastery.

In whatever form it takes, contemplative women esteem the practice of asceticism as a means of opening themselves as completely as possible to the action of grace. Interpreted in this way, penance serves as a fruitful preparation for prayer.

Prayer

It seems fairly apparent from their replies that the process of renewal has not altered contemplative women's understanding of the role and significance of prayer in their life. Intimate, uninterrupted communion with God remains the ultimate concern, the cherished ideal of their existence. To be sure, all do not receive the grace to know God in the obscure, quasi-experiential manner of contemplation. Nevertheless, the changes instituted by the Council, especially as regards the liturgy and the impetus given to ecumenism in the post-conciliar Church, could not but influence and in some measure alter the way nuns pray.

Encouraged by the breadth and flexibility of the revised Liturgy, many contemplatives said they felt impelled to explore a less structured way of prayer, often seeking and obtaining permission to experiment with different liturgical settings. Customs such as reading prepared communal meditations aloud and the imposing of assigned spiritual reading gradually fell away in most monasteries of women in this country as a less formal approach to prayer began to develop. Several communities observed that the new liturgical rite, with its numerous options and the ability to be adapted to various cultures, allows for greater liberty of spirit in worship. They find the revised Liturgy--shortened, simplified and prayed in the vernacular--offers those who use it the opportunity to internalize more of what they recite.

To some extent an increased appreciation of world religions also influenced the way nuns pray. Dialogue between the Catholic Church and non-Catholic religions offered contemplative women the chance to learn about and experience prayer in the Eastern tradition, often resulting in a deeper appreciation of the riches contained in the spirituality of the Christian West. In a paper given at the 1988 meeting of the American Benedictine Academy we read:

Light from the East on our own Scriptures and Christian mystics is teaching us that the inner transformation process begins with contemplative prayer. Non-Christian ways of prayer and meditation are aiding us in fostering our Christian, Benedictine spirituality by helping us rediscover aspects of our own spirituality which have been neglected during the past centuries, and therefore are bringing us to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the mystery of life in Christ.⁵

Looking at the changes made in the way contemplatives pray leads to the question, "Does changing the manner of prayer affect praying itself?" All of the nuns with whom I discussed this question replied that they believe it does for them, but they preferred not to make generalizations regarding so personal and unique an experience. Owing to the interaction between body and soul in the accomplishment of all human acts, however, it seems likely that the process of renewal affected not only the manner in which contemplatives pray but also, to a greater or lesser degree, the experience of prayer itself.

Conclusion

Beneath the pluralism of expression in terms of observance and custom, contemplative religious women remain committed to their ideal. How these women interpret the effects of renewal in regard to enclosure, silence, asceticism and prayer depends on such conditions as the age and number of their community's members, the number of vocations they receive, their economic stability and the availability of ministerial personnel. Judging by their responses to my questions concerning the contemplative life, however, all the nuns with whom I spoke or corresponded agree in their fundamental understanding and appreciation of their vocation. Contemplative women endeavor to forget themselves as objects of reflection in order to find themselves and all humankind in Christ. They see their life as one of prayerful intercession, reparation and freedom through grace. Their lives continue to bear witness to Christ's promise, "Blessed are the single-hearted, for they shall see God." (Mt 5:8)

Notes

1. The survey was conducted by Sister Lilla Marie Hull, M.M., in preparation for a lecture entitled "The Concerns and Needs of Contemplative Religious Women Today," delivered at the National Conference of Vicars for Religious, March 11, 1989. I am grateful to Sr. Lilla Marie for graciously sharing her survey notes and lecture with me.
2. The Documents of Vatican II, edited by Walter M. Abbott, S.J. (New York: America Press, 1966), p.471

3. From a lecture delivered at the 1971 meeting of CCA, cited within the lecture entitled "Contemplative Life in Carmel: A Review of the Renewal Years," given by Sister Jean Alice McGoff, O.C.D., pp. 4 and 7. I am indebted to Sr. Jean for her kind permission to quote from her lecture.

4. With Light Step and Unstumbling Feet, 1977, pp. 3 and 5.

5. Sister Mary Catherine Wolfe, O.P., "The Following of Christ, II Regular Observance," One Mind and Heart in God: Dominican Monastic Life, ed. by Sister Mary Catherine Wolfe, O.P., (Conference of Nuns of the Order of Preachers of the United States, 1989), p. 83.

6. Sister Pascaline Coff, O.S.B., "Eastern Influences on Benedictine Spirituality," Cistercian Studies, 24:3 (1989), 262.

POETRY
and
BOOK REVIEWS



The Nail



THEY MADE ME STRONG, THICK AND LONG
HEAVY AND TWISTED, ROUGH-SIDED, COLD.
HAMMERED, BEATEN, DULL-POINTED
GRINDING, SO THAT I COULD TURN AND HOLD
INTO SPLINTERED WOOD

OR WHATEVER THEY SMASHED ME INTO.

I CAME WITH MANY OTHERS.

SHOVED AND CARELESSLY THROWN TOGETHER IN A HEAP
TO AWAIT MY TURN.

AN UNKNOWN DESTINY.

ENDLESS WAITING...

BUT I KNEW IT WOULD COME..SOMEDAY.

BITTERNESS GREW..I HAD LAIN SO LONG, WAITING.

COLDNESS DEEPENED, STIFFNESS, SHARPNESS.

IN DARKNESS, UNABLE TO SEE, MOVE OR ACCOMPLISH,

MY IRON TASTED IRON, BLUE BITTERNESS ON MY TONGUE.

INDIFFERENCE PITTED AGAINST RUST.

NOT MANY OF US LEFT..SOON NOW.. SOON.

THE LID WAS TORN ASIDE.

A HAND SCRUMMAGED, FEELING FOR A STRENGTH I HAD.

I WAS LIFTED

THROWN INTO A POCKET DARKNESS, SAGGING, BANGING, CLINKING

I STIFFENED... EXPECTANTLY.

MY IRON ROLLED AGAINST OTHERS.

STINGING HARDNESS, COLD INDIFFERENCE

ALL SWINGING TO A FATE ... AN ENDING.

IT WASN'T A LONG WAIT.

TOSSED ON THE GROUND, I ROLLED INTO LIGHT

WITH A FEW OTHERS, IN STICKY DUST.

THERE WAS A LOT OF NOISE.

I COULD NOT SEE, IT WASN'T MY NATURE TO SEE

BUT ONLY TO FASTEN AND HOLD

IN RIGID BLINDNESS.

OTHERS WERE FIRST..

STRANGE VIBRATIONS SHOOK ME

WHERE I LAY.

THERE WAS A SUDDEN DROP OF WARMNESS ON MY HEAD

I SHUDDERED!

GRABBED, AND POISED ABOVE A SOFTNESS

MY INNER COLDNESS TREMBLED, RECOILED, PULLED APART,

SCREAMED !!

EVEN I, IRON AS I WAS, KNEW THE TOUCH.



IT TOOK A FEW TERRIBLE BLOWS
 TO SEND ME SMASHING THROUGH.
 AGAINST MY HEAD THE RINGING SPARKS
 TILL MY FEET HIT THE WOOD AND DUG IN .. DEEP.
 AN AWESOME SOFTNESS CLOSED ABOUT ME
 SACREDNESS STOOD UPON MY STRENGTH.
 O MY GOD, MY GOD .. I SHRIEKED ! DID THEY NOT KNOW?
 I pulled, STRAINED, REACHED .. SEEKING RELEASE.
 BUT THE PATIENT FEET HELD ME.
 So helpless, so helpless..
 A shaft of IRON WRAPPED IN SHATTERED PAIN.
 MUST I BE RESIGNED TO play my DESTINED role?
 I WAS MADE TO HOLD, TO FASTEN
 SELECTED, CHOSEN ..
 O God.. I MUST .. I MUST.
 I firmed out to give support
 TO THE PINIONED FEET ASTRIDE my back.
 COLDNESS TURNED TO WARMTH AS FLESH SEARCHED
 FOR SOME hold OF COMFORT.
 No .. I could NOT SEE .. I WAS ONLY IRON.
 BUT GLAD I WAS FOR my LONG ROUGH FIRMNESS
 THAT HELD SO CLOSE THE TATTERED FEET
 I WOULD HOLD HIM AS LONG AS HE WILLED
 SENDING UP THROUGH THE REDDENED STREAM
 My OWN SILENT ADORATION.
 WITH my POINT bedded IN THE WOOD
 I OPENED WIDE TO hold THE WANING STRENGTH.
 O SUCH WEIGHT .. SUCH WEIGHT.
 EONS, EONS .. ON my UNBENDING ORE.
 O AWESOME DESTINY! I found my place
 And could NOT wish for MORE.
 And WHEN I AM pulled out
 And laid aside..
 I WILL NEVER BE THE SAME
 FOR REDEEMING BLOOD HAS WASHED my IRON
 And MADE IT CLEAN.

Sister Mary Angela
 Bronx

GENESIS

My words are not my own now.
 I am the words of the one who made me. ¹

One

In the beginning was the Word ²
 and the Word created
 the deep in me
 a formless void
 dark covered
 with darkness
 only the Word was there,
 in black shadow hovering.

Then there was light in me,
 which the darkness vied
 but could not overpower.

And I saw the light was good,

And I watched the Word
 divide darkness from light
 and name them.
 So it came, my first day.

Two

In shadow and light
 I flowed endlessly
 until the Word
 vaulted and clove me
 into two parts:

the depths
 the heights

the second day.

Three

Then the Word established land in me.
 firma terra
 earth on which to settle and be constant
 and in my stable ground,
 the Word shaped trees
 that bore fruit
 with seeds in their very middles
 and plants and flowers sprung up,
 red, yellow, green, blue
 all with seeds, seeds!

Ground and life
 the third day.

Four

Then the Word said,
 "I will conceal infinity from you."
 It made separate lights,
 one hot orb for day
 and at night a moveable circle
 which grew like a white thought,
 then faded to silence

And stars were made
 to sparkle me
 reminding me,
 "There's a festival today!"
 They made me forget the boundless.
 Steady the sun, the moon, the stars, beat their rhythm,
 the fourth day.

Five

Then the Word created
 birds in me
 some that hung on wind
 some that closed their wings
 to dive for prey.

And it made creatures that moved
 in my depths:
 Leviathans, and clawed shells
 that crept on the bottom
 and simple swimmers
 wearing flesh of gold
 and green and grey.

they multiplied
 and I was afraid the fifth day.

Six

But, the Word would not stop.
 It pulled from my deep, black core
 hooved creatures, serpents
 and beasts
 howling and digging.

Trembling, I ran through
 this creation and cried out
 like a poet in a stone tower,

"What hurts the soul
 My soul adores.
 No better than a beast
 upon all fours." ³

And, desolate, I crawled into a cave of earth.

But, the Word found me
 It said, "What are you doing here?" ⁴

It took me into the world again
 and formed me into the shape of itself.

Yet, I was the dust of a soft pencil
 Thin, frail letters on a page

Until the Word blew gently
 on the edges of my letters,
 my symbols,
 my signs.
 It entered me
 and I knew the Word was God
 God was in me
 I was in God

I was a word holding creation.
 And he whispered in a soft breeze
 keep me here inside you
 and I shall give you dominion
 over all that I have made in you."

I did not cover my face like Elijah ⁵
 I called like Tieresias,
 like John from water:

"Laudate Dominum, my darkness and light.
 Laudate eum, my heaven and earth.
 Praise God, my trees and plants.
 Praise God, my birds and beasts.⁶
 Give praise, my people,

praise Him.
 the sixth day

Seven

On the seventh day
 The Word rested in me
 and blessed me
 and made me holy.
 I would be a master craftsman,
 delighting in the Word;
 day after day
 Ever at play in its presence
 at play everywhere in its world.⁷

S. Mary Ann of Jesus, O.P.
 Fatima, Portugal

NOTES

1. John 14:24
2. John 1:1
3. W.B. Yeats, "What Hurts the Soul"
4. Gen. 3:9
5. 1 Kings 19:13
6. Psalm 148
7. Proverbs 8:30-31

ALIVE IN TRUTH

A new world alive in truth,
 in peaceful possession of your first beauty,
 teach us, Americas, lush with virgin soil,
 to become white as shepherd's sheep wool,
 noble as purple mountain majesty.

Alive in truth,
 fired fast in chains,
 red skins bound fast in slavery,
 teach us to forgive,
 as you did, peoples of the South and of the North.
 Ground us unto meal in your spirit,
 in life, liberty, happiness.

Alive in truth,
 rained upon in poverty,
 over shadowed in suffering,
 you witness to us now,
 you moisten words of grace,
 you utter parables long forgotten,
 you breathe forth the odor of wisdom
 in your solid, stolid tree trunk courage.

Alive in truth,
 come unite us Montesinos, Cordoba, las Casas,
 Bertrand, Rose, Martin, John, Mazzuchelli,
 ride swift your mounts through our slick paved streets.
 Whistle forth the watch dog of Dominic.
 O send forth the biting torch of truth,
 the rekindling flame of integrity.

Come, O Great Spirit!
 Brand us unto new life.

Sister Mary Regina, O.P.
 Farmington Hills, MI

This poem honors the anniversary of the founding of the Americas as well as the spiritual and missionary work of Dominicans in the New World. The Dominican persons mentioned were heroic in the faith and in their efforts for peace and social justice toward the indigenous of the land.

The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy, by Charles Homer Giblin, SJ, 1991, Collegeville, "A Michael Glazier Book", (Good News Studies, vol. 34).

The theme of our Assembly, pointing as it did toward the 21st century, brought to mind a phenomenon that often comes along at the turn of the century namely, the use of apocalyptic imagery and vocabulary. We who by vocation become steeped in God's Word are frequently in touch with the apocalyptic in our everyday reading of Scripture. The great New Testament work cast in the literary genre known as "apocalypse" is, of course, John of Patmos' Book of Revelation. If you have found this intriguing work to be a "sealed scroll which no one can open", you will welcome the new insights provided in The Book of Revelation: The Open Book of Prophecy by Charles Homer Giblin, SJ.

Thanks to Fr. Brian Davies, OP, the Bronx community has had the privilege of monthly Scripture lectures by Fr. Giblin who teaches at nearby Fordham University. Perhaps by pointing you in the direction of his commentary on Revelation we can share his expertise with you.

Fr. Giblin contends that an understanding of the eschatology and literary structure of Revelation provides the key that unlocks its meaning, and his entire book can be said to revolve around those two pivotal points. The originality of his contribution is to be found in his convincing approach to the entire trajectory of Revelation as a unified whole, both theologically and as a carefully-wrought literary composition. This is spelled out especially in his treatment of the cohesive thematic of God's Holy War of Liberation as Gospel. A comparison with other commentaries, such as that of Adela Yarbro Collins in The New Jerome Biblical Commentary, shows the uniqueness of Fr. Giblin's thesis. Using Fr. Giblin's book as a guide, a careful study of Revelation makes one appreciate the intricately orchestrated and highly sophisticated piece of inspired writing we have in this word of God in the words of John.

The author brings to this little paperback the fruit of thirty years of labor. Though intended for a fairly wide audience, it is by no means a quick-study, but the effort involved in mastering its 231 pages is well rewarded. For convenience, the entire text of Revelation is included. The footnotes and parenthetical notes give many bibliographical references that are enriching to pursue. I found it useful to photocopy the outline-précis provided on pages 12-18 and to keep this close at hand as I studied. Its presence eliminated some of the frustration that is inevitable in studying such a complex work. Fr. Giblin gave us two additional charts not found in the book and these are helpful study aids also. I would gladly mail a copy to anyone who is interested.

You will notice a few typos here and there but most are obvious. If I were to make any criticism at all it would be to comment on the awkwardness of some of the sentences. Parenthetical information is sometimes inserted in such a way that a rereading is needed in order to grasp the somewhat obscured meaning. An index would be a helpful addition. But these are minor points.

I think that by your study of Fr. Giblin's book you will find yourself drawn more deeply into this revelation: of our Father, "the Enthroned"; of the risen Lord Jesus, "the Pierced One", "the victorious Lamb"; and of the Spirit, the source of prophetic inspiration who "speaks to the churches". It is they who draw us and enable us to say: "Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might belong to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

Sr. Lee, OP, Bronx

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